THE ROAD to the ISLES

Kenneth Macleod

THE ISLES
BUTT of LEWIS
LROAG
STORNOWAY
EYE PENINSULA
LEWIS
SCARP
HARRIS
THE MINCH
TARBERT
BERNERAY
SOUND of HARRIS
GAIRLOCH
NORTH UIST
MAODAL
LITTLE MINCH
BENBECULA
DUNVEGAN
APPLECROSS
ISLE of SKYE
SOUTH UIST
LOCHBOISDALE
ERISKAY
CANNA
RUM
BARRA
EIGG
MINGULAY
MUCK
BARRA HEAD
ATLANTIC OCEAN

79
CANNA
RUM
EIGG
MORAR
MUCK
MOIDART
FT. WILLIAM
ARDNAMURCHAN
COLL
MORVEN
APPIN
TIREE
STAFFA
MULL
OBAN
ATLANTIC OCEAN
IONA
LORNE
LOCH AWE
ISLES OF THE SEA
LOCH FINE
COLONSAY
JURA
ORONSAY
ISLAY
BUTE
GIGHA
ARRAN
CAMBELTOWN
FIRTH OF CLYDE
P.R.F.H.

THE ROAD TO THE ISLES

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THE ROAD TO THE ISLES

POETRY, LORE, AND TRADITION OF THE HEBRIDES

BY

KENNETH MACLEOD

WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY
MARJORY KENNEDY-FRASER

EDINBURGH
ROBERT GRANT & SON
1927

The Celtic Cross on the front cover, from the Isle of Eigg, that on the back—the Nunnery Cross, Iona—and the End-papers and Tail-pieces are from drawings by Patuffa Kennedy-Fraser

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TO

THE COMRADES

HERE AND BEYOND

WHO HAVE MADE MY SHARE OF LIFE

A GREAT JOY TO ME

Much that is in this volume is to be found associated with the music in the four volumes of Songs of the Hebrides published by Messrs Boosey & Co. and Messrs Paterson, Sons & Co.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THIS book consists of material contributed to the 'Songs of the Hebrides' and 'The Celtic Review' from the year 1907 onwards. It treats of old ways and old thoughts, but of these as re-lived in the Gaelic outlook of the twentieth century.

In the case of the lyrics, some of the translations are in prose ; the form of the others has been determined by the tunes to which they are sung. Hebridean song is sometimes so strangely irregular that an interpreter who wishes to preserve its atmosphere is forced to devise forms of his own, regardless of convention.

It is made quite clear in the notes what of the material is old, what new, and what partly new and partly old. Also, an attempt is made to explain such words and phrases and ideas as might, perhaps, cause some difficulty to the reader.

The writer has one difficulty of his own : that of knowing where the old material ends and the new begins. The difficulty may be put in this way. Your family has lived, say for a thousand years more or less, within sight of the Coolins of Skye ; through people who seldom forgot anything, you became the heir to

a great deal of the lore and lyric which such names as Dunvegan and Mary Macleod suggest ; not only so, but you were yourself born and brought up, say, in the very centre of the Clanranald country, Dunvegan's rival in song and culture as well as in war, so that from the cradle you were unconsciously drinking in a life and thoughts that had all but died out elsewhere. The result would be, that if you began to write a book, say twenty or thirty or forty years after, you could not always be certain whether this thought or that verse was really your own, or something out of the past. Not that it greatly matters. An Islesman born in the nineteenth or the twentieth century is as much an Islesman as one born in the sixteenth. And, apart from everything else, in work of this kind one has to weave the threads that are blown by the wind towards one : a half-remembered tale, a tag of a song, a proverb, a passing remark at a feast or in a sorrow.

An Islesman is dominated to a large extent by the evening walk down to the creek, where lies the old wreck, now partly covered with sea-pinks. There he cannot but think of the many strange boats that have passed by ; one steered by a woman singing far-away tunes ; another by a little child who came and went like a tune, and is at the heart of all true song.

K. M.

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INTRODUCTION

THE fundamental, the long-enduring element in racial song is undoubtedly melody. Melodic inspiration and invention are rare, very rare indeed. But melodies, once they are forged are durable and mostly outlast by generations, if not by centuries, the words to which they may have been originally sung. And yet a melody alone is not a song! However fine a melody may be, the born poet, if he have as much understanding of the emotional possibilities of a tune as he has of the lyrical and hypnotic potentialities of words, can make of a melody, welded with his own infectiously inspired words, a great song.

To keep alive the traditionally preserved hoard of racial song, the national poet must be re-born every couple of centuries at least, if not every three or four generations. And, like Robert Burns in Lowland Scotland in the eighteenth century, he must use all that comes to hand, all that has survived of the finest lyrical output of the previous generations. Single lines, refrains, beautiful thoughts, heart-stirring local imagery, rhythms, metres, etc., must all be garnered and re-fashioned into lyrics that will be new and yet old. This

calls for great artistry, but the songs thus fashioned, while original, will be still racial in character.

Of Burns's 'My Love is like a red, red rose,' Edmund Gosse says somewhere that not a line of it is original—that it was all fashioned out of the wreck, the flotsam and jetsam of earlier Scots song. Yet, is not this the law of life, that 'there is nothing new under the sun,' although, luckily for us, there is always possible a new blend.

And what Robert Burns did in the eighteenth century Kenneth Macleod is doing now for Scots song.

Kenneth Macleod in his childhood in Eigg heard much and he forgot little—in his teens he became a conscious collector. But the lore in this book must not be regarded as mere translation. Baldly translated songs are worthless, alike as lyrics and as words for singing. The atmosphere, the emotional content of a lyric, depend as much on its sound-colour, its rhythm-clang as on its verbal meaning.

Describing in 'The Reiving Ship' the vessel's exultant, headlong, reckless, outward course, his lines run :—

> Grinds beneath her grey-blue limpets,
> Crunches curving whelks to sand-drift,

and, clearing the rocks and getting into quieter waters :—

Sweeps she gaily Moola's waters,
Kyles and Moyles to fair green Isla,
Leaps her way to Isles of daring,
Gleaming Isles of blades and laughter.

How suggestively descriptive of the vessel's grating on the rocks, in her hurried outward quest, are the harsh gr's and cr's of the first couplet, and how contrastingly the soft liquid l's of the second depict the suavity of the open sea.

Many are his contributions to mystical lore, one of the loveliest being 'The Vow Song of the Birds,' and, to the cult of Columba, 'The Iona Rainbow'; for communal singing there are the well-known tramping songs, and the, as yet, less known 'Joy Invocation' and 'Birlinn Health-drinking Chant.'

His restorations of the pre-Christian Heroic include :—'Aillte,' an Ossianic ballad; 'Deirdre's Farewell,' a still more ancient fragment; 'Cuchullin's Lament for his Son,' a story parallel to that of the Persian 'Sohrab and Rustum' of Matthew Arnold's poem; and, finest of all, perhaps, 'Fionn's keening for his grandson, Oscar.'

In the expression of Sea-joy he surely finds himself. The—

All I long for
Outsails my longing far,

of 'Sea Moods,' culminates in—

Joy of Seeking
Joy of ne'er finding.

And in his Sailing Song Cycle, he voices the universal human longing to escape from the humdrum of our daily round :—

> All the wonders yont our croft dykes
> I will see if I but may ;
>
> All the ships that sail to Lochlan
> I will steer if I but may ;
>
> All the sunsets yont the Coolins
> I will reach if I but may,

and through ' The Kyle of Moole ' we sail, until on the ' Leaping Galley ' we find ourselves at last exultantly sailing seaward.

I have had the joy and privilege of singing and speaking Kenneth Macleod's lyrics and tales from John o' Groat's to Land's End, and further afield from Chicago to New York, from Amsterdam to Paris. And everywhere I have been asked if the English of his Tales and Songs might not be had in a less bulky form than that of our musical publications.

His lyrics were written for singing. A lyric that reads beautifully may not sing, and words written for singing may cry out for their tunes. But his prose tales lose nothing in this tuneless edition.

The beautiful ' Christ Child's Lullaby ' and ' The Death of Oscar ' are notable examples. Of the quality of his prose, one writer has said that it is finer than many a one's verse, that it is indeed at times comparable to a rosary of moonstones.

The nature of his work of restoration may be summed up in a parable of his own. It alludes most quaintly to an eighteenth-century gathering up of the wreckage of a very ancient St Donnan Song—attributed in legend to the angels—a song which he himself re-fashioned, over a century later.

'The Isle of Eigg, as the sheep know but too well, has its own share of bramble bushes. A hundred years ago, a woman who had a name for thrift as well as for art, went wool-gathering in those same bramble bushes as regularly as others went dulse-pulling on the shore. And in due time there came out of her loom a web of blues and greens and *Crotals*, which a king might envy. Generally the web went to a neighbour of her own, Iain Og Morragh, who had an eye for art, if not for thrift, and who, like herself, was a weaver, but of song-threads blown about by the four winds of heaven. It was he who, standing one day by the tomb of St Donnan, and looking across to the face of Corravine, weaved old threads into new so cunningly that none could tell what of the web was his own and what the angels'. If, after a hundred years, the loosened threads have been put once more through the loom, it is still the same web that comes out of it—"Youth on age, on the face of Corravine."'

MARJORY KENNEDY-FRASER

THE ROAD

BLESSING OF THE ROAD

May the hills lie low,
May the sloughs fill up
In thy way.

May all evil sleep,
May all good awake,
In thy way.

THE PILGRIM'S RUNE

King of the Elements—Love-Father of Bliss,
In my pilgrimage from airt to airt,
From airt to airt,
May each evil be a good to me,
May each sorrow be a gladness to me,
And may Thy Son be my foster-brother,
Oh may Thy Son be my foster-brother.

Holy Spirit—Spirit of Light,
A pilgrim I throughout the night,
Throughout the night,
Lave my heart pure as the stars,
Lave my heart pure as the stars,
Nor fear I then the spells of evil,
The spells of evil.

Jesu—Son of the Virgin pure,
Be thou my pilgrim-staff throughout the lands,
Throughout the lands,
Thy love in all my thoughts, Thy likeness in my face,
May I heart-warm to others, and they heart-warm to me,
For love of the love of Thee,
For love of the love of Thee.

RUNE OF HOSPITALITY

I saw a stranger yestreen ;
I put food in the eating place,
Drink in the drinking place,
Music in the listening place ;
And, in the sacred name of the Triune,
He blessed myself and my house,
My cattle and my dear ones.
And the lark said in her song,
Often, often, often,
Goes the Christ in the stranger's guise :
Often, often, often,
Goes the Christ in the stranger's guise.

THE REAPER

The isles and the mainland of Gaeldom are full of ridges and furrows, in which, generations back, the oats and the barley grew and the reapers sang, but which, wrested from their tillers, have long since, for the very shame of it, as the bard has it, covered themselves with moss and heather and bracken. In the days when those ridges and furrows had a spring-tide and a harvest-tide, Gaeldom was a land of glad song. Sixty years ago the *Gruagach*, a woman of the other world, standing on the Laig brae in Eigg, watched, along with a mystic of the isle, the reaping of the fields of Cleeadale. Across the waving corn rose and fell, like the waves of Laig Bay, the lilt of the reaping song—*Heiteagan àirin hù ho-i-ro, heiteagan àirin hù o.* "O Ian Og," said the woman of the other-world, "the making of the bread, is it not the gladsome thing!" It was—it may be—it should be. And yet the reaping-song of the Gael has never been the purely joyous gladness of the young mavie which has never known the sorrow of the empty nest or of the deserted wood. To the singing of the harvest-song goes the life of a year, or of all the years—the summer that is gone, the winter that is coming; the ones who have sown but are not here to reap; the ones who will sow when the reapers that are have been forgotten; the Good Being

who makes the sun shine and the corn ripen, and who opens the ear to the singing sands of Morar, and the eye to the phantom kingliness of the Coolins of Rùm and the Coolins of Skye. There may be the breath of a sigh in that song, but there is also in it a whole storm of rapture, perhaps of feyness. Gladness must come to its own some time ; for the sorrows, there are all the times ; for the reaping, there is but one time. To the harvest-field go we, then, for life as it ought to be. The sickle is fate, the hand that holds it is ours, and for once we will be the conqueror. Cut we down a sorrow here and a pain there, bind them, and make them our slaves. Sure, then, this is the glad day, and the beautiful world, and the brave life—what we shall afterwards dream of in the long winter night.

MORAR REAPER'S SONG

Beauteous Morar, green thy coat is,
Sheen o' gold on thy forehead.

Full o' bird-music thou in Beltane,
Fragrant wi' dew-laden hazel.

Grassful, foldful thou in Okvees,
Laughing, songful thy reaping.

Beauteous Morar, green thy coat is,
Sheen o' gold on thy forehead.

I WEAVE TILL DAWN

Warp on the woof
I weave till dawn,
Love,
By the sheiling.
Warp on the woof,
Love,
I weave till dawn.

Blue on the green,
Like the dew on the grass,
Love,
By the sheiling.
Blue on the green,
Love,
I weave till dawn.

TANGLE AT EBB TIDE

Seared, yon tangle
Waits till flowing tides afoam
Its youth shall thrill to waking.

So pant I, blood-driven,
For Isle-waves abreaking.

THE WAITING CROOK

There was once a saint in Moidart who was always putting taunt upon himself as being the least of all the brethren, and the most useless. And one day he said within himself : 'No work that I am fit for has ever come to me ; I will now take me to the hill, and let the Good Being himself choose a track for me.' On the third day he came to a great wooden cross partly decayed, standing on the edge of the peat moss. He knelt at the foot of the cross, and when he opened his eyes again, what saw he there but a shepherd's crook lying on the heather, as if it had dropped out of a hand. He took up the waiting crook, and, hurrying on, he now came to a clachan here and a clachan there which had waited long for the man with the crook.

DANCE TO YOUR SHADOW

'But Mary Macrae heeded not, and went on in her own way, singing her songs and ballads, intoning her hymns and incantations, and chanting her own port-a-bial, mouth-music, and dancing to her own shadow, when nothing better was available.'

CARMINA GADELICA

Dance to your shadow when it's good to be living, lad,
Dance to your shadow when there's nothing better near you;
Dance to your shadow when its fine to be living, lad,
Dance to your shadow when there's nothing better near you.
Ho ro haradal.

Dance to your shadow when it's hard to be living, lad,
Dance to your shadow when there's nothing better near you;
Dance to your shadow when it's sore to be living, lad,
Dance to your shadow when there's nothing better near you.
Ho ro haradal.

Dance to your shadow and let Fate to her fiddle, lad,

Dance to your shadow when there's nothing
better near you;
Dance to your shadow, for it's fine to be living,
lad,
Dance to your shadow when there's nothing
better near you.

Ho ro haradal,
Hine ye haradal,
Ho ro haradal,
Hine ye han dan.

SEA MOODS

THE CELT AND THE SEA

Probably the Islesmen owe their love of the sea even more to their Norse than to their Celtic blood. The old Celts regarded the sea as a dark, mysterious power, cruel as an evil woman, but most effective as a protection against their enemies. The Norsemen, on the other hand, thought of the sea rather as the ' path to glory ' ; beyond the waves were strange lands and boundless wealth, waiting to be claimed by men of the necessary daring. In short, in their attitude towards the sea, the Celt was the better poet, the Norseman the better sailor. In their common descendants the two traits are combined ; the Norse love of the sea has been deepened and variegated by Celtic fervour and imagination. Thus, of all subjects, the one dearest to the Hebridean poet is ' the ship at sea '—the ocean in its ever-changing moods, and the ship in its eternal contest with the waves. The descriptions of this contest are, as a rule, delightfully exaggerated, but graphic as only a true sea-dog could make them :—

Far travels the noise of the boat
Galloping through the Sea of Erin ;
Far travels the noise of her leaps
As she bounds through the swelling ocean ;

Wind and tide and the fury of the deep
Hurl themselves against the darling ;
But the rare Macleod is at the helm,
The bellowing wave to him is music.

And so, with a good helmsman, the boat defies the combined efforts of all the elements, and reaches her destination in safety. Such was the luck of Alexander Macdonald's famous 'Barge of Clan-Ranald'—such also the luck of the 'Iubhrach Ur,' the New Barge, so popular in Hebridean folk-song :—

Goes she through Caol Muile fawnlike,
Then across to Eilean Uaine,
Back in gallop o'er to Moidart,
Past the hilly isles of caves,
Past the mountains dark and frowning,
Past the reefs so low and cold,
And athwart through mountain-billows
To the Brindled Isle of brave men
To the Sunny Isle of fair ones ;
O many a dark point has she rounded,
Many a gray limpet pounded,
Many a curving whelk powdered,
As she gallops through the silent straits.

Every boat, however, is not equally lucky. Though the sea, being strong and generous, seldom pushes matters to an extreme, especially when the boat shows pluck, yet there are other enemies to be reckoned with, such as the mean, cowardly rocks, which lurk and crouch under

the waves, and never show themselves in the light of day. 'A new boat and old rocks,' so the Gaelic proverb tersely describes the conflict between the two. The rocks are old and cunning and unscrupulous, the boat is young and simple and unsuspicious, and so a thousand tragedies follow, and the Gaelic folk-songs go ever softlier and sadlier.

The wife sits in her lonely hall and croons to her only child the story of her widowhood :—

I see the barge within the creek
Sweethearting with winds and waves.

When she sailed out to the deep
Never a teal-duck greeted her

But a raven ever on her track—
O pity those at sea to-night !

And though the trembling woman ashore tries to counteract the raven's influence by reciting the old charm :—

Fire and water on thy wing,
The curse of God in beak and flight,

yet what is fated must happen, and the boat with all on board goes down :—

Rest to their souls, a place in glory,
A good reception from King and Virgin.

The sweetheart again sits on a rock by the seashore and questions the seagulls as to the fate of her sailor-lad and his gallant crew :—

Little seagull, ocean seagull,
Snow-white seagull, what thy tidings ?
Where, O where, are the fair young lads ?

And the seagull makes answer :—

I left them all in the ocean-depths,
Face to face, and each one lifeless.
Back to back, and red blood flowing—
Their pillow to-night the soft seaweed.

And the maiden wishes that she too were there :—

Side by side, my sweetheart and I,
Never to move and never to part,
Ever falling asleep, our companionship quiet.

Another, to whom even the seagulls could bring no tidings, good or bad, of her dear one, cries out pathetically :—

O Virgin, pity me to-night
If his shroud be the tangle,
If his couch a sandy hollow,
If the seals his wake-attendants,
If the fish his waxen candles,
If his harp the croon of waves.

Nor less sincere is the grief of the sister as she thinks of three young brothers who will never again put into port, though their boat was one of the rarest ever built :—

"When she getteth up her white sails,
Fairer she than the young Bride of Clan-Ranald.

Never a wave in strait or ocean
But dances with joy when she puts to sea.

Never a seal or brindled teal-duck
But seeks to follow in her wake.

She goes to Uist and she goes to Lewis
And across to Rōdel in Harris.

But so fair and swanlike is the boat that the wild Minch falls in love with her, and, mad with jealousy, suffers her not to return to land :—

Covets her, the Sea of Skee,
Nor allows her visit shore.

And thus it is that—

She reaches not Uist, she reaches not Lewis,
She reaches not Rōdel in Harris.

In spite of the tragedies, however, the love of the sea runs strongly in the Hebridean blood,

and frequently becomes quite a passion. 'O for one glimpse of the Western Sea' is the constant cry of the islander whom fate has placed in the heart of the mainland, with the unfeeling mountains around him. To this *Ionn-drain-cuain*, Sea-longing, Gaelic poetry owes some of its most exquisite verses :—

Deep the longing that has seized me,
Song nor fiddle chase it off—
In my ear resounds the ocean,
The sea-voices call me home.

O sun on high, 'tis little wonder
The glory of joy light up thy face—
From the glen and night thou glidest
To embrace the Western Sea.

O were it mine, thy westward journey,
Sure I'd never glide so slow—
Yet to-night thou'lt kiss the ocean,
While over me the mountains frown.

And if the old proverb can be trusted, this affection is mutual. 'The sea invites acquaintance,' and out of this acquaintanceship springs a friendship which, on the side of man, is stronger than the fear of death ; and on the side of the sea is as generous as it is sometimes rough—so generous indeed that, to the Barra fisherman, the Western Ocean has become *Cuile Mhoire*, the Virgin Mary's Treasury. That there are

limits to her generosity, every Celt knows ; she is extremely jealous of her rights, the most sacred of which is perhaps the custody of her dead. 'The sea,' says an old Gaelic rhyme, 'will search the four russet divisions of the universe to find the graves of her children.' Hence a body washed ashore should be buried as near the water-mark as possible, so that the sea may 'recover her own,' if such be her will. The neglect of this rule is supposed to have been the cause of many a memorable flood in the Hebrides—old Mother Ocean rushing inland to claim her own. And if the physical difficulties should prove too much for her, she wakens out of their long sleep a few golden-haired vikings and sends them ashore to do her bidding. In the early years of the nineteenth century, the North Uist people, on a day still spoken of, reverently laid in their ancient Temple of the Trinity an unknown body washed ashore by the flowing tide ; at twilight a mysterious-looking barge glided into the bay, three of its crew marched up silently to the temple, opened the newly-made grave, carried off the body, and then disappeared for ever into the darkness and the great open sea.

One can easily understand how, with such spirits and mysteries, the sea has cast her spell upon the impressionable Celt, and has given his songs and stories a colour which is not of this world. Her generosity, her might, her playfulness, her frequent cruelty, each is duly dwelt

upon ; but what really haunts the Celtic mind is her awful mysteriousness. There is scarcely a rock or creek or headland in the west which is not glorified by some tale of the supernatural, told with the artless art which makes realism. In the island of Eigg, when the autumn moon is full, the young people still go down to the shore to dig for sand-eels, and to pass a merry hour of song and dance. One at any rate of these occasions has been made memorable by a story and a ballad, in the lines of which one hears the roll of the mysterious sea breaking on far-away shores :—

One night was I in the eel-shore,
I saw the moon in the heavens,
I sang my rune in the name of the Triune,
I blessed myself and all my dear ones.
She came to me, the fair one of the noble face,
She spoke to me in words sweet and low.
'Thou art the glad but I the sad woman,
I have lost the ship, I have lost my Diarmid,
I have lost my son, the fair-young, ever-young.
I have sought him up, I have sought him down,
I find not the trail of my nursling.

. . . . .

In the isle of the sweet-voiced maidens,
In the cave of the slimy reptiles,
Late and early a-seeking him,
At ebb-tide and flow-tide a-seeking him,
A-seeking my lost one, Diarmid,
A-seeking him, ever a-seeking and yearning.'

I sang my rune in the name of the Triune,
I blessed myself and all my dear ones.
She vanished, the fair one of the noble face.
But I heard a weeping in the heavens,
I heard a shrieking in the nether-sea :
' My fair young love, my Diarmid,
Accursed am I, and ever hell-tortured,
A-seeking thee, ever a-seeking and yearning,
My fair young love, my Diarmid,
O my fair young love, my Diarmid.'

Perhaps the Eigg people were greater dreamers than others, at any rate they frequently saw things it was hardly lawful for mere mortals to see. Not so many years ago, for instance, a few of the more gifted ones actually saw a *long-theine*, a fire-ship, careering past the isles with lightning speed, ' and on the deck was a long, lean, black creature, with a fiddle in his hand, and he ever playing and dancing and laughing—and O St Mary and my love, awful was the howling that was below ! '

Such the mysteriousness of the sea which makes Eigg an isle of dreams ; doubtless the fire-ship was conveying the soul of some unrighteous Southern lord ' to its own place.'

A more pleasing picture is that of the White Ship, as of crystal, in which the pre-Christian Celt sailed to his Island-Heaven far out in the Western Sea. The Celtic hope indeed, whether in Christian or in Pagan times, ever lies in the west and the sea ; there the sun sets in the

evening to rise again in a morning which may tarry but will surely come.

> On the hillside I recline
> Ever yearning for the lost,
> Ever looking to the west,
> Where the sun sets in the sea.

Very curiously, however, the Celtic Heaven or Hope has from the first been limited by a Doctrine of Election ; in Pagan as well as in Christian times some were ' chosen ' and others not, and the deciding factor was the will of the other-world rather than the conduct of man. Possibly the explanation is that Celtic religion, whether Christian or pre-Christian, has been largely coloured by the influence of the sea. The God of the Celt was as the Atlantic, infinite and eternal, terrible in anger, never to be trifled with, mysterious in His actions, harsh to one and gentle to another. Men who knew from experience how one boat reached her harbour in safety while the other went down, how the sea brought wealth to one family and death to another, would be more likely than most to believe and even find comfort in such a doctrine as Predestination. In religion, however, as in everything else, the old Celtic world is fading away before the modern and the ' rational.' All this may be ' progress,' but it is doubtful if the race has been improved

thereby ; at any rate one may be pardoned for preferring the old Celt to the new, and lamenting the passing away of the deep-souled hero who, trusting equally in his religion and his dirk, met life and death as a boat meets the waves. Even in these degenerate days, there are a few Celtic dreamers who, when the night is dark and the wind high, close their eyes and picture to themselves the Clan-Ranald Barge rushing through the Western Sea, the watchman chaunting 'The Dawn-Prayer.'

Fragrant maiden of the sea,
Thou art full of the graces,
And the Great White King is with thee.
Blessed art thou, blessed art thou,
Blessed art thou among women ;
Thy breath steering my prayer,
It will reach the Haven White ;
Let me beseech thy gentle Son
To whom thou gavest knee and suck
To be with us,
To be on watch,
To be awake ;
To spread over us His Sacred Cowl
From ray-light to ray-light,
From the golden-yellow ray of twilight
To the new-born white ray of dawn,
And through the dark and dangerous night
To succour us,
To guide us,
To shine on us

With the guidance and glory of the nine rays
of the Sun,
Through seas and straits and narrows
Until we come to Moidart
And the Good Clan-Ranald,
O until we come to Moidart
And the Good Clan-Ranald.

And if the few Celtic dreamers who hear the Dawn-Prayer in the darkness and the storm should have, as they must have, the dramatic instinct, they will see also another boat lurking somewhere near hand, haughty Macleods on board—the clan of fire and music—voices and waves blending together as the Dunvegan sea-hymn is chaunted forth triumphantly :—

Thou who dwellest
In the heights above,
O succour us in the depths below ;
Vouchsafe to us a day-breeze
As Thou Thyself wouldst wish,
Vouchsafe to us a night-breeze
As we ourselves would choose.
May the clouds hide us,
May the moon shine on the foe,
Be we to windward
And becalmed be they ;
O keep firmly tethered
All sudden blasts and accidents—
And leave the rest to us
And to our daggers true,

O leave the rest to us
And to our daggers true—
And we shall give the glory
To the Trinity and Clement
And the great clerk who lives in Rōdel.

. . . . .

THE REIVING SHIP

A-ho-hee! Hirrm bo!
Early sails she to the reiving,
A-ho-hee! Hirrm bo!
Flashing by the frowning headlands.
A-ho-hee! Hirrm bo!
Early sails she to the reiving.

A-ho-hee! Hirrm bo!
Grinds beneath her grey-blue limpets,
A-ho-hee! Hirrm bo!
Crunches curving whelks to sand-drift.
A-ho-hee! Hirrm bo!
Early sails she to the reiving.

Sweeps she gaily Moola's waters,
Kyles and Moyles to fair green Isla,
Leaps her way to Isles of daring,
Gleaming Isles of blades and laughter.
A-ho-hee! Hirrm bo!
In the dawn she goes a-reiving.
A-ho-hee!

BRIDE IN LAUGHTER

Now and again in harvest time, when there is a light breeze, and the sea is on the swell, more for the joy of it than from evil intent, and the setting sun has the rich glow of the sea-tangle, St Bride's Bird, the oyster-catcher, may be seen, proud and graceful, rising and falling with the rising and falling waves. On such an evening the Islesfolk say that Bride is in laughter.

Skies to westward
Shine like sea-tangle,
Bride's in laughter rare!
Fal liu o.

All I long for
Thro' the blue sea-deeps
Outsails my longing far!
Fal liu o.

Joy of seeking,
Joy of ne'er finding.
Bride's in laughter rare!
Fal liu o.

'YONT THE COOLINS

All the wonders 'yont our croft-dykes,
I will see, if I but may.

All the ships that sail to Lochlann,
I will steer, if I but may.

All the sunsets 'yont the Coolins,
I will reach, if I but may.

FEY SEA-LAUGHTER

So we will go a-sailing,
A-run, by the Sodor Isles,
Yes, we will go a-sailing
To track the dreams ayont the Kyles.

For love's there and fey sea-laughter,
Lilts like the drift of sand,
And storms too, and thrill o' wind,
And boats o' yew from Lochlann Land.

It's free there and wayless there,
A new day each day, my lad,
The heart's throb can steer the boat,
Its law is like the wind, my lad.

THE ROAD TO THE ISLES

A song, lad, a tale is there,
To set hearts on fire, my lad,
The old call from gull and seal
Will pull thee out to sea, my lad.

To Isla, to Moola, lad,
By Jura, by Sgarba, lad,
And outward to Isles of Song,
And Isles ayont them all, my lad.

BY THE KYLE OF MOOLA

By the Kyle of Moola
We'll outsail the life o' yon slave—
By the Kyle of Moola.

Speed, my boat, across the sea,
Cleave those tumbling waters whose laughter
Leaves us daft and free.
A ho hee, a hua!

By the Kyle of Moola
We'll outsail the life o' yon slave—
By the Kyle of Moola.

Joy to steer for nowhere near,
Joy to ride o'er ruts that like waters
Leap and laugh nor fear.
A ho hee, a hua!

By the Kyle of Moola
We'll outsail the life o' yon slave—
By the Kyle of Moola.

Ha! the tang for far, free ways,
Hey! the itch for witchery shorelands,
Dear and nameless days.
By the Kyle of Moola.

THE SINGING WATERS

The child of the Isles, in his play hours and in his herding hours, makes for the nearest linn, and building a boat out of the iris leaves, he gives her prow to the sea and her stern to the shore, so to sail to a wonderland beyond the waves.

The Islesman, tracking his work into the heart of the mainland, is wont, in his sane moments, to go sea-wandering to the nearest waterfall, or even waters without a fall, if only they sing true. There he becomes the little child again, making, as in his herding days, the iris boats—great ships of Lochlann, galleys of Kishmul, and saucy little smacks of Tiree. The linn is the Western Sea; the stones are the Isles. Here is the Scoor of Eigg, there the Coolin of Rùm; further out, if the stones be

big and shapely enough, are the Coolins of Skye ; and still further away, the many Isles from the Butt of Lews to Barra Head. And the boats !

They make for Uist, they make for Lews,
They make for Rōdel of Harris,
The sunny Isle of beauteous women,
The sandy Isle of sturdy men.

And when the night has swallowed up the last great ship of Lochlann, the Islesman bends his ear to the singing waters, and in them he hears the waves breaking on far-away shores, from the White Sands of Colonsay to St Clement's Strand in Harris.

Croon, river, sea-laughter
To an exile sea-longing.
Croon, river, sea-laughter.

Thus a mother of the Isles, thinking of an absent one : O Thou who didst watch over my little child as he played with the iris boats, and he a-herding, watch over him, too, as he puts out to sea, or yearns at the foot of far-away hills.

Croon, river, seas breaking,
Tempest toss'd on lone Barra.
Croon, river, seas breaking.

Croon, river, seas rolling,
Lilting west o' green Canna.
Croon, river, seas rolling.

Croon, river, deeps calling ;
Lulls nor ebbs the sea-longing.
Croon, river, deeps calling.

SEA-SOUNDS

In *Eilean a' Cheo,* the Isle of Mist, as the folk of the Hebrides call Skye, there is a certain headland which ought to be named, but is not, the Headland of Waiting. Many years ago, and yet not so many either, on one of those beautiful nights which have passed away with the fairies, a young maiden, tempted by moonlight and love of the sea, found her way to the furthest point of that same headland, and also found when there that she was not alone. Sitting on the rocks were the women of the township, waiting and listening till the dip of the oars and the sound of the *iorram,* the boat-song, should foretell the return of the men from the fishing-banks and the luck of their catch. By-and-bye, there came across the waves the sound of a light airy iorram (perhaps the sea-reivers' song) accompanied by short quick strokes. 'Och! och!' said the women, 'light is the fishing to-night, but lighter still are the hearts of our men, and warm the welcome before

them, be their luck what it may.' Later on came other sounds, fainter this time, the tired thud of long laborious strokes and the rising and falling of the slow-rowing iorram, *Iùraibh o hì, iùraibh o hó.* 'Isn't it the beautiful sound!' said the women, 'there is luck on someone to-night, and the luck of one is the luck of all.'

The sounds of the Western Sea are aye such as can be 'understanded' of the folk. They foretell good weather and bad, birth and death in the township, the drowning of dear ones on far-away shores. In the storm they voice the majesty of the King of the Elements, and in the quiet evening they fill one with a longing which is hope born of pain. Perhaps other seas have voices for other folk, but the Western Sea alone can speak in the Gaelic tongue and reach the Gaelic heart. To an Islesman the German Ocean, for instance, seems cold and dumb, a mere mass of water seasoned with salt; it has no mermaids and no second-sight, and if it has seals, they are not the children of the king of Lochlann. To one sea only does the old Gaelic by-word apply:

Dh' iarr a' mhuir a bhi 'ga tadhal.
The sea likes to be visited.

And if the sea-sounds are sweet to the Islesman at home, they are sweeter still when by faith he hears them in the heart of the mainland, with the unknown mountains closing him in.

'Columba must have seen a vision of angels to-night,' said a man of the glens to one of the Iona monks, in the course of a missionary journey on the mainland; 'there is the joy of heaven in his face.' The master overheard the remark. 'Angel nor saint have I seen,' was his reply, 'but I have heard the roar of the Western Sea, and the isle of my heart is in the midst of it.' Centuries after, a daughter of Macneill of Barra, home-yearning in a glen far away from the isles and the sea, heard the same eternal roar:

> Deep the longing that has seized me,
> Song nor fiddle lifts it off,
> In my ear the ocean sounding
> Sets me roving from the glen,
> And sea-voices ever call me:
> Come, O love, to thy home-land.

Centuries come and centuries go, but the sea-voices never lose their old charm. A few years ago a young Skyeman working in Glengarry succeeded, by sleight of heart, in glorifying a very tiny waterfall into a mighty sea. 'I sit in the heather and close my eyes,' he said, 'and methinks the waterfall is the Western Sea—and, O man of my heart, my heaven and my folk are in that music.' More wonderful still was the 'gift' of the Lews servant girl in Glasgow, who could hear twelve different sea-sounds in the roar of the electric cars and the street traffic. The blood! the blood! it is

aye the same. St Columba in the sixth century, the Barra lady-lord in the sixteenth or seventeenth, the Skye crofter and the Lews servant girl in the twentieth—they are all of the west and of the sea, and deep ever calleth unto deep.

Iuraibh o hi, Iuraibh o ho,
For the Isles my heart is weary, ho ro.

Iuraibh o hi, Iuraibh o ho,
Dear loved Island sounds I'm hearing, ho ro.

Iuraibh o hi, Iuraibh o ho,
Sound of dragging cables o'er shingles, ho ro.

Iuraibh o hi, Iuraibh o ho,
Sound of oars that rend the waves, ho ro.

Iuraibh o hi, Iuraibh o ho,
Sound of seamen's voices ringing, ho ro.

Iuraibh o hi, Iuraibh o ho,
Sound of sand-drift 'mong the *muran*, ho ro,
Ho i ho-o-o rionn eile.

SEA-LONGING

Sore sea-longing in my heart,
Blue deep Barra waves are calling,
Sore sea-longing in my heart.

Glides the sun, but ah, how slowly,
Far away to luring seas.

Hear'st, O sun, the roll of waters
Breaking, calling, by yon isle ?

Sun on high, e'er falls the gloamin'
Heart to heart, thou'lt greet those waves.

Sore sea-longing in my heart,
Blue deep Barra waves are calling,
Sore sea-longing in my heart.

THE WIND ON THE MACHAIR

Sing high-dilanna ho-hee,
Winds a-blowing, winds a-blowing,
High-dilanna ho hee.

Winds a-blowing o'er the machair,
Like your wishing, fresh and free ;
Tang o' shore and shell and tangle
Pulls my sea-blood out to sea.

Winds a-blowing o'er the machair,
Just at play like you and me ;
Track of seal and Lochlinn's eider
Pulls my sea-blood out to sea.

Winds a-blowing o'er the machair,
Death to webs and life to glee ;
Boat that sails for joy of sailing
Pulls my sea-blood out to sea.

Sing high-dilanna ho-hee,
Winds a-blowing, winds a-blowing,
High-dilanna ho hee.

SEA-REIVERS' SONG

Hook-òr-yin-o !
When winds do blow,
Sea-reivers know the madd'ning music.
Hò-ee-o ! The winds do blow.

He-ee-reel !
Great shoals of seal,
Hard by our keel, fast follow after.
Hò-ee-o ! The winds do blow.

Wild sea-ducks and greedy geese
Look for a feast, when we're at anchor.
Hò-ee-o ! The winds do blow.

Hook-òr-yin-o !
On Davach low,
There's kine and corn and golden candles.
Hò-ee-o ! On Davach low.

Men at play, e'er close of day,
Will cold as clay in kiel be lying.
Hò-ee-o ! The winds do blow.

Men that sleep
Will waken wide,
E'er with the tide we leave their Cala.
Hò-ee-o ! The winds do blow.

SONG OF SEA-WIDOWHOOD

I am the woman of sorrow
On the knoll of the sheiling ;
A-seeing the lads
In the gulf a-drowning.
Tho' a hurt to me each one of them,
He of my love is the wound of me.

Dear to me thy ringleted locks
Ever tossed about on the crest of the waves,
And thou low-lying in sea-wrack
Where the high-tide has stranded thee.

See, O God how I am—
A woman without heart for ever,
A woman without son, without husband ;
A woman without gladness or health.

Merry was my Christmas,
Black and sorrowful my Easter.

THE SEA-SORROW

The sea has given to Hebridean song its fiercest joy and its most passionate sorrow. The songs of sea-rapture are much less numerous and are, as a rule, the songs of men ; the

songs of sea-sorrow are invariably the songs of women. The men reive and rove, and dream of strange lands and adventures beyond the waves. But the women lose their husbands and brothers and sons and sweethearts, and the burden of their song is—

Cold, cold, cold,
Cold the sea and snakish,
Cold, cold, cold,
From depths to top-wave she.

This gloomy picture of the *Tir-fo-thuinn*, the Land-under-waves, is not, however, the one given by those who ought to know best: the spirits of the drowned ones. 'Cold thy bed to-night,' said a woman once to the spirit of her drowned husband. 'It is neither hot nor cold,' was the reply, 'but just as one might wish, if as he wished he got.' 'If not cold, lonely at any rate,' suggested the woman. 'I have the best heroes of Lochlann beside me,' said the man, 'and the best bards of Erin, and the best story-tellers of Alba, and what we do not know ourselves, the seal and the swan tell us.' 'Treasure of my heart,' said the woman, 'are not we the foolish ones to be weeping and sorrowing for the men, and they so happy in the Land-under-waves!' '*Is fhior duit sin*! Thou speakest truth there!' said the man, as he vanished into the night and the sea. To sorrow for the drowned ones is worse than

foolish, however, it is actually cruel to the men.

A heavy dress : sorrow,
A heavier shroud : sorrow.

And more than once the weeping woman on the shore has heard the voice of her lost one in the waves entreating her to lift off him the burden of her grief.

A-Võre, my love, lift off me thy woe,
The clouds are above and the clouds are below,
The stars are above and the stars are below,
The cleric has gone above, but better far to be below,
A-Vòre, my love, a-vore, my love,
Lift off me thy woe, lift off me thy woe.

'Never a sigh comes from the heart,' said a woman of Uist, 'but a drop of blood falls in its place.' And in Eigg the old folk said that the tears of a woman o' sorrow fell in blood-drops on the heart of her loved one under the sea—'and is it not the sad thing to be drowned twice, once by the waves, and once by the tears of your folk!' And not only is the sorrow of the women cruel to the drowned ones, but it is also a source of danger to themselves. It is considered wrong, for instance, to sing a drowning-song twice in an evening, and some of the

older generation refuse to sing one at all after sunset. 'It is not right,' one is told, 'to disturb the rest of the ones-no-more; it is bad enough to put sorrow on them, but it is seven times worse to put anger on them.' And stories are current in which the spirits of the drowned ones, exasperated beyond all patience, appear in their old homes between midnight and cock-crow, and give the women-folk a fright which soon dries their tears and banishes their sorrow. It is a remarkable fact, indeed, that in the Hebrides (where one would least expect it) excess, whether of joy or of grief, is regarded as a direct tempting of Providence, and one is often told that 'laughing overmuch is an omen of tears, and weeping overmuch an omen of greater evil to come.' But the folk laugh and weep all the same, and that to excess, and one feels that the laughter and the grief which can risk the anger of Providence and of the world of spirits must be genuine at any rate.

Mouth of gladness!
Music's Laughter!
Sad that I am not beside thee!
Ho ro ho, hook-o.

On ridge of ocean,
Shelf of shore,
What-place-so-e'er the tide has left thee!
Ho ro ho, hook-o.

Side by side
My love and I ;
Ever quiet,
To sleep a-falling ;
Croon of waves
O love, our *tālla*.

Ah, my wound !
He hears no more ;
Wave-drowned is
My cry of woe.

Mouth of gladness !
Music's Laughter !
Sad that I am not beside thee.
Ho ro ho, hook-o.

THE SKUA GULLS

SEA-REIVERS' MOUTH MUSIC

Birds of the breeze we,
Skua gulls, a hoo-o
Out on the reiving !
Hee ree a vŏ vŏ.

Fear we no heaving,
Hurricane nor goblin,
Track of the teal-duck
Ours from Lochlann.

Birds of the breeze we,
  Skua gulls, a hoo-o
Out on the reiving!
  Hee ree a vŏ vŏ.

Rage on the ocean,
Wind on the vaunting—
Crack of our fingers
For their taunting.

Birds of the breeze we,
  Skua gulls, a hoo-o
Out on the reiving!
  Hee ree a vŏ vŏ.

THE SHIP THAT SAILETH HOME

AN ISLEWARD CHANTY

Love that wanders, give no heart to,
  Hee-ree-o, halovee!
Ebb and flow of waters yon love,
  Ho-ro hee-o, ro-va-hoo-a.

Love that loves thy cattle, hear not,
  Hee-ree-o, halovee,
Wind from Northland, cold wi' snow yon,
  Ho-ro hee-o, ro-va-hoo-a.

Love that trembles, give no wound to,
Hee-ree-o, halovee.
Yon's the ship that saileth homeward,
Ho-ro hee-o, ro-va-hoo-a.

SEA-TANGLE

Here is a tale of fate and the sea, and of human passion deep as either.

It was low tide. The heat was gathering itself into a sleepy haze. The two half-sisters, tired of the dulse-pulling, laid themselves down on the skerry, out of which grows the soft cool sea-tangle.

'Little sister of my heart,' said the jealous one, 'in thy child-days I used to weave the golden-brown tangle into thy golden-brown hair, and the golden-brown of the hair put the golden-brown of the tangle to shame. Forget this once, thou art the wife-mother, and play we the old play.' Deftly, cunningly, she weaves the hair into the tangle, crooning a lull-song as she weaves :

Tangle and hair,
I weave ye,
Fast to the rock
I leave thee.

With the croon of the song and the lap of the waves, sleep comes softly, quietly, to the

lulled one. Leaving the sleeper fast to the rock, the jealous woman stands on the shore, her eye towards fate and the sea.

The tide rises. The blue water round the skerry becomes deeper and broader. Over the sleeper creeps the slimy, clammy eel, and her waking cry is that of the wounded sea-bird : U-vil ! u-vil !

Tangle and hair,
I weave ye,
Fast to the rock
I weave thee ;
Tangle and gold,
I weave ye,
Fast to the rock
I weave thee

Far the haze upon the deep ;
On kyle nor sea, cool winds can breathe.

Tangle and gold, tangle and gold,
Gold unto gold, I weave ye ;
Fast to the rock, I leave thee.

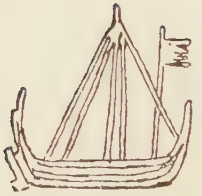
U-vil ! u-vil !
By the shore no pity wilt show,
Woman yonder ?
U-vil ! u-vil !

A jealous sister,
Na haori, horo,

Here enticed me,
Hooko,
And has left me,
Here a-drowning,
Cold my bed,
Cold and slimy,
Wet with tears,
Wet with brine.

Blessing of Jesus, blessing of Mother,
Blessing eternal be on my children.

My little child, love of my cooing,
Seek'st thou to-night thy mother's bosom;
And if thou seek'st, vain is thy seeking,
Full 'twill be of the sea-water.
U-vil! u-vil!



THE ISLES OF SONG

THE ISLES OF SONG

The Hebridean Celt is not of those who cannot sing because they are in a strange land ; on the contrary, he never really finds his voice until he has wandered far from the Western Sea and the Isles. True, his singing is not always appreciated in his new surroundings, and in that case he goes apart into a quiet nook, near a waterfall, and there, under the stars, croons to himself the music of his folk. And as the old familiar sounds come rolling from the heart to the tongue, and from the tongue to the ear, he is no longer a stranger in a strange land—he is piloting a boat through the Western Sea to the creek in which, as a boy, he bathed, having dived from the flat rock with the queer name. How fragrant the night is now !—just the sort of night that comes fresh from the heart of the Good One. The sail is full of the homeward breeze ; the waves leap and lap against the sides of the boat ; the stately mountains glide past ; the seagulls fly overhead ; the lights along the shore beam softly and kindly, as if in welcome ; and, ere long, to the best of luck is added the joy of danger. To the right is the Black Reef, to the left the Death-Rock, and, in the channel between them, the tangle

is peeping through. But, there! the steering hand has lost none of its old cunning; a few turns of the helm and the boat heaves through, and is soon bounding into the creek. Across the slippery weed-covered rocks leaps the exile, and before him lies the well-beaten track of his youth, and of his father's youth. In the passing, he has time to notice the two or three old boats lying upside-down on the beach, and the heaps of mussel and limpet shells near the cottage door, relics of a generation of fishing; and then up goes the door sneck, and into the reek and the light of the peat steps the wanderer. How the kindly folk of the ceilidh spring up! all wonder and gladness, and—*Fàilt air an fhear a thainig dhachaidh*—Welcome to the man who has come home. But the night is short and must not be wasted; the man who has come home has much to hear and learn ere the flowing tide floats his boat again. He has forgotten the last three verses of *Ailein Duinn, o hì shiubhlainn leat*; he sees here a woman who has good reason to remember them; he must get her to sing the old song, the glory-song of pain, till the lost verses get a grip of his heart. And while he remembers —there is yon queer twirl in *Iùraibh o hì, iùraibh o hó* —he must learn it before he leaves. There is another thing too—another thing!—yes, scores and scores of other things, both songs and tales, which, if not picked up now, may go down into the grave to-morrow with

this old woman or with that old man. If only time would dawdle a bit in the passing! But time never does when the Celt is supremely happy; and with a start and a shiver, the man who has come home suddenly realises that the ceilidh and the kent faces and the old songs and the Western Sea have all vanished, leaving the stars cold and the air chilly and the waterfall hoarse. And as the exile turns his face towards the home which is not home, his night-wish (and the old folks say that a night-wish always comes true) is something like this: if only the songs and tales of yon ceilidh were gathered into a book, so that they might be safe, for a while at any rate, from the sneaking fingers of that black thief Time!

In the middle of the nineteenth century a smack crossed from the Island of Eigg to the mainland once in the week, weather and inclination permitting, for the few letters and the one newspaper brought by the stage-coach from Fort William to Arisaig: about a fortnight later, somebody sailed across from Rūm to Eigg to see if any letters had arrived by the packet-boat within the previous month; in the course of another week, more or less, a shepherd from the west side of Rūm, looking for stray sheep, unexpectedly found himself in the seaport clachan of Kinloch, and while there might remember to ask if there were any letters for the neighbouring Isle of Canna; on the following day the folk of Canna saw a fire on a certain

hill in Rūm, a sign that their letters had somehow or other found their way to the shepherd's house, and some time before the end of the week somebody, who had probably never in his life received a letter, sailed across the Sound and returned with the mail-bag as soon as he felt in the mood for returning. Those were the days of song and tale, for no man was the slave of time or of the penny post, and to be in the mood for a thing was but a short step from the thing itself. Canna Isle, now so unknown owing to quicker transport by steamers which are always passing by, was then the midway port between the Outer Isles and the mainland, and, as such, was a veritable mart of lore and music. The folk of the isle never hung pot of fish or potatoes on crook without putting into it the stranger's share, and seldom, if ever, went that share unclaimed. The herdman, night, which brings all creatures home, brought the boats of all the isles into the harbour ; and for kindness received, the strangers ever paid handsomely, if not in gold, at any rate in song and tale. The writer owes something to Canna Isle and to the boats which struck sail in its harbour.

He owes even more to his native Eigg ; the little island, six miles by three and a half, which now dreams, in the Western Sea, of the time when it was an independent kingdom, with a queen of its own ! In its day it has been the scene of dark deeds, picturesque ceremonies, and plots without number. The

martyrdom of St Donnan in the sixth century, the crowning of a Lord of the Isles in the fifteenth, and the burning of all the inhabitants by the Macleods of Dunvegan in the sixteenth, are but the outstanding events in the history of an island which for centuries was the recognised centre of the Clanranald territories, and which, further back, in the days of the Island Kingdom, had been a favourite rallying-point for the Western clans, when in the mood for plots. Such a place was the natural home of tale and ballad, and tales and ballads there were, as plentiful as the blaeberries—so plentiful, indeed, that a man might live his full fourscore years in the island, and yet hear something new at the ceilidh every night of his life. The writer was fortunate enough to spend his boyhood in Eigg just before the old order of things had quite passed away. Several of the folk could boast that their parents had been taught a little reading and writing, and a great deal of poetry by *Raoghall Dubh*, son of the famous bard, *Alastair Mac Mhaighstir Alastair*; while everybody in the island over sixty years of age had been themselves pupils of *Iain og Morragh*, poet, musician, dancer, courtier, and, last of all, dominie. Ranald Macdonald is known in Gaelic literature as the compiler of a valuable collection of poems published in 1776, but if the Eigg tradition may be trusted, 'Little worth were the things in the book compared with the things which were not there at all;

sure, it is books, and books to excess, he might have sent out ; never was his kist of meal as full as the one in which he kept the bits of paper and the old skins brimful of writing.' If only the bits of paper and the old skins (probably the missing Clanranald manuscripts) had been preserved !

Even more interesting than Ranald Macdonald was Iain Og Morragh. The son of a Skye laird, he spent his early years in a Government situation in London ; but high living and a warm heart soon brought him within sight of the debtor's cell, and to save himself he had to escape to his native Skye, where for the next few years he told and retold wonderful stories of Court life and the Princess Caroline. Eventually his friends got him appointed to the parish school of Small Isles, and there, for over a generation, he played the fiddle, composed and collected songs, and taught the youth of Eigg the Spanish ambassador's deportment and the Princess Caroline's curtsy. 'He was a treasure of a teacher,' said one of his old pupils ; 'on dull or rainy days, his first words to us always were : "Ye children of other folk, what brought you here to-day ? My curse on gloom ! it was ever a bad teacher—let us to the fiddle and the dance." And on bright sunny days he was equally sensible : "Is it not a great sin, children of my heart, to be packed in this narrow room like puffins in a hole, while the sun is so warm and radiant outside, and the bird-world so

frolicsome!" And, indeed, we were always of the same opinion ourselves, and, in the twinkling of an eye, out we all were on the green sward at the foot of the hill, laughing on the threshold of a beautiful day of song and dance. Och! och! the young foolish days! But my thousand blessings on *Iain Og Morragh*—may his soul have found rest!' Wise old master! if he failed to make the youth of the island bad Saxons, he made them at any rate good Gaels, ready on the slightest provocation to rush into song, and dance, and tale.

Eigg was in those days, and until recently, a nest of antique Celticism. Every inch of it was alive with legends and other-world beings. Mysterious tales made the caves and the kirkyard a terror by night; the sealwoman crooned on the reefs; the mermaid bathed in the creeks; the fairies sang and piped in the knolls; the water-sprite washed in a certain burn, the shrouds of the dying; the kelpie hatched plots in the tarns, against beautiful maidens; the spirits of murdered baby-heirs sobbed in gloomy nooks; mystic boats, 'with a woman in the prow ever weeping, and a woman in the stern ever shrieking,' glided into the bays at twilight; and on the first Monday of each quarter, a fire-ship passed the island at midnight, with 'a long lean black creature on board, a fiddle in his hand, and he ever playing, and dancing, and laughing,' while 'tween-decks lost souls clanked their chains, and shrieked, and cursed. Such

was the Eigg night under the stars. Within doors, however, at the ceilidh, the folk told the tales and sang the ballads of the Fayne, or of the less ancient heroes, the Lord of the Isles, Macleod of Dunvegan, and 'our own treasure, Clanranald,'—with, for Sundays and holy days, beautiful legends of Iona and Oronsay. But ever, whether on holy or on other eve, as midnight drew nearer, the tales and the songs, and the distant roar of the Western Sea grew weirder, until at last song and tale ceased, and the fire smouldered, and the cruisie-light flickered and the folk whispered, while over the ceilidh crept the shadow of night and the mysteries hiding therein. 'Sweet is the song of the lark at dawn,' said the Eigg folk, 'but sweeter the crow of the cock at midnight.'

There are echoes of other Isles, too, in this book. Eriskay, sacred to the memory of Father Allan Macdonald, makes itself seen and heard; and the music of many isles and many seas, lilts and sobs through its pages. In Uig, Skye, one may still see the little cottage which gave shelter long ago to the literary legacy brought from Dunvegan by one of *Clann a'Chomhairlich*, 'The Counsellor's Family,' and carried later to the Island of Eigg by a woman who never forgot song or tale, and whose favourite by-word was: 'A short giving with the gold, a long giving with the song; not far goes the golden coin in a crowd—to a world of

folk goes the song.' In that same cottage is a room in which Janet Macleod and a girl-friend once imprisoned a famous old songstress, the, only woman in Uig who knew the spinning-song given in this book ; nor did they set her free until they had memorised, behind the barred door, the long tricky chorus. The writer, for one, has reason to bless that little cottage on the shores of the Western Sea.

Nor is it the only one. On a certain headland in North Uist there stands a crofter's house, overlooking a wide ford, beyond which lies a small island utterly unknown to the outside world. ' This an inhabited island ! ' exclaimed a stranger who once found himself there, though how he knew not, ' there is nothing here but white sand making a poor attempt to grow sea-bent ; a score of solan-geese could eat up the whole place in a week ! ' But the solan-geese know better ; so also do the women who milk the cattle, and the men who sow and reap the barley, and the lads who ride the sturdy little ponies across the fords. On moonlight nights, if the tide be suitable, the men-folk of the little isle cross over to Uist, each going his own way according to the errand he is on, and some time before midnight they all form again in the headland house overlooking the ford. A youth is placed at the western window to watch for the appearing of certain reefs above water—the rider's reef, if ponies are handy, the foot-man's otherwise ; the rest of the company are in the

humour for a ceilidh, and if wit and humour, tales old and new, ballads of the brave long ago and satires on the latest wedding or the latest heresy hunt, can make a ceilidh, then here is the best in the Outer Isles—the ceilidh which never yawns. Time and tide are left waiting, outside, and the reefs become dry, and wet again, ere the men rise to go ; and as the last of them rides or wades across the ford, one feels that here is a world in the world, of which London is not the centre, and gold not the god, and in which a man has time to remember that he is soul as well as flesh. The writer owes something to the house overlooking the ford.

In another isle there stands, or let us say there stood, within sight and sound of the Outer Sea a tack-house known to a lucky few as the House o' Music. To a Gael the soil around was historic ; Flora Macdonald had played there in her young days ; and in a certain ale-house, the ruins of which were now overgrown with nettles, the Clanranald gentlemen, had, in the days of romance, toasted through the long weary years the Old Cause and Our King over the Water. But to get at the secret of the place one had to be a guest in the House o' Music ; on a lucky night too, when visions could be seen in the peat fire, and when the songs were sung and the tales told by a Celtic patriarch, and by another, a woman pictured in the old lines :—

Beautiful her music on the harp,
More beautiful than her music, her goodness.

One such night always meant another, and another meant a week, and at the end of that time, if the call of the world had to be obeyed, one left the House with the typical Celtic farewell ringing in one's ear : 'Would it not be the beautiful thing now if you were just coming instead of going!' And the 'beautiful thing' always did happen sooner or later, for that is the way of the West—a far wandering perhaps, but aye back to the old tune, and the old friend, and the old isle. As for the House o' Music, such as knew it and loved it long ago can never keep it out of anything they write.

The Western Sea is wide, however, and the Isles are many, and the old life and the weird tales and the queer songs and the sore tunes are all for the wanderer ; for him who has sailed in the smacks and crossed by the fords and waited the ferry ; who has heard runes chanted to the rising sun and to the new moon ; who has seen mysterious rites of healing and saining in the dim crusie-light ; who has frequented the midnight ceilidh of many clans and districts ; who has helped the folk of the shore-clachan to dig for sand-eels in lonely bays under the full moon ; who has spent long evenings with the wandering tribes, in the hazel wood, by the side of the burn ; and who has camped out with ancient herdmen whose talk was of the old droving

ploys: men mixing their cattle and their oaths at the toll-house, and clinking their glasses and joining in the chorus at the ale-house, on their way, by Kintail and Glengarry, by Lochaber and Rannoch, to the lowland trysts.

> Nor music that birds do sing
> Late or early in the grove,
> Nor music of sound or sea
> But heard the errant-knight anon.

Nearly all the songs and legends in this book have come from the Northern Hebrides—the Isles to the north of Ardnamurchan Point. This in itself is a confession that, even in the Hebrides, what may be called folk-life is gradually disappearing. 'What is a feast for a king?' asks an ancient Gaelic by-word; and the answer is; 'The sea-ducks of Colonsay, the harping of Oronsay, and the swelling tunes of Jura.' The king would need, however, to be less æsthetic in these days; he might still, indeed, dine off the sea-ducks of Colonsay, but not even his royal will could command the harping of Oronsay or the swelling tunes of Jura. And, before long, the Northern Isles may be equally barren of traditional music. Already the curious old songs are being forgotten, and in tone and colour, and probably in scale, the airs of the folk are changing.

The lore given in this book is of a life in the

passing, and is such as the folk will recognise as their very own. Incidentally, it gives a bird's-eye view of Gaeldom from the misty beginning to the present time. Fionn, and Diarmad, and Grainne are here; whether they be gods become men, or men become gods, who can decide?—at any rate, they love and hate, plot and weep, at a time when day and night have a mouth, and the birds speak, and the serpent is worshipped, and Hades is terrible, not because of its heat, but because of its biting cold. Here, too, is Iona, teaching truth to the living, chanting consolation to the dying, and battling to the death with paganism for possession of the Isles. And, as if to show the issue of the struggle, we have also here the salt life which reives and prays with equal vigour—always pagan by day and Christian by night. Here, too, is some of the glamour of Jacobite times; the Silver Whistle calling the Gaels, for the sake of the Old Cause and the honour of the fathers, to Prince Charlie's side; and Flora Macdonald, in a remote isle, stitching her sampler and making a love-lilt to her sweetheart, and then laying both aside to play with Saxondom for a king's life. And behind the mythological and historical movements, we find here the common life of the folk; work and love, pain and death; and the worst as well as the best of it set to music. Passing strange that drudgery and pain should rush into music as naturally as the sparks fly upward; that a girl milking a cow,

an old dame spinning the wool, men rowing a clumsy fishing-skiff, a woman in tears because a seaman has been drowned—that such things should move the folk to song as easily as the dawn sets the lark trilling or twilight the mavis. To a race with soul, however, there is nothing common or tame in the whole range of life, from birth to death.

TO IONA

For their sake who lived and died in thee,
Sang their faith and taught their joy to me,
For their sake I bow the knee,
Iona the blest, '*I mo chridh thu*,'
Isle of my heart, my grail.

For their sake who hear themselves in thee
Sing of yore thine ancient melodie,
For their sake I bow the knee,
Iona, the blest, '*I mo chridh thu*,'
Isle of my heart, my grail.

For their sake who still shall find in thee
Evermore life's holy artistry,
For their sake I bow the knee,
Iona the blest, '*I mo chridh thu*,'
Isle of my heart, my grail.

TO THE ISLE OF SKYE

Dear to me Duntulm,
Dear to me Dunvegan far away ;
Far away from harp and croon, I'm yearning,
Isle of Skye mo chridhe,
Far away.

Dear to me thy bens,
Dear to me the Coolins far away ;
Far away from peak and moor, I'm yearning,
Isle of Skye mo chridhe,
Far away.

Far away from Love and Youth, I'm yearning,
Isle of Skye mo chridhe,
Far away.

TO THE ISLE OF MULL

Thou Isle o' Moola, austere and awesome,
Thou risest cloudward thy vows to render,
Thou Isle o' Moola athwart the glow-light,
Thou callest homeward who yearn and wander.

Thou kingly island of towering mountains,
Aloof, majestic, in light or greyness,
Thou isle of peaks that outsoar the eagle,
A woman's heart beats behind thy sternness.
Thou Isle o' Moola, etc.

Thou Prophet Isle, when the days are torpid,
And drowse on shores by the winds forsaken,
Thy voice of thunder peals o'er the waters,
Till isle and coastland from sleep awaken.
Thou Isle o' Moola, etc.

Thou leal, alluring, broad-shouldered island,
Who lose thee find thee when life is weary ;
Through lonesome nights, by the deeps of oceans,
Thy soul is taught when thy peaks are dreary.

Thou Isle o' Moola, austere and awesome,
Thou risest cloudward thy vows to render,
Thou Isle o' Moola athwart the glow-light,
Thou callest homeward who yearn and wander.

ALTAR ISLE OF THE SEA

THE BENS OF RŪM

Eilean Rūm, Eilean Rūm, Eilean Rūm, mochree,
Ever haunt I the Beallach, gazing outward to sea,
Floating clouds lie above,
Floating Coolins below,
Tir-nan-Òg of my heart,
Floats my dream to thy glow.

Ever floating, ever floating, ever floating by thee,
Are white clouds of incense,
Altar Isle of the Sea.
Like the incense of love, rising out of the gloom,
Are the mist-wreaths that float
On thy blue peaks, O Rūm.

Eilean Rūm, Eilean Rūm, Eilean Rūm, mochree,
Sure a vow I am making,
Altar Isle of the Sea,
Floating mist-wreaths above,
Floating Coolins below,
Tir-nan-Og of my heart,
Glides my dream to thy glow.

THE COOLIN OF RŪM

O Bhrighde! 'tis seaward, the dreamland, the youthland,
O Bhrighde! and seaward the Coolin of Rūm,
Afar in the dreamtide I'm hearing hill waters,
Like lilting of streams by the Coolin of Rūm.

The Grail of the dreamland, the youthland, is love-lit
Beside the hill waters afoam to the sea,
Like tangle at noontide, like snow-wreath in moonlight,
And thou who art yearning shalt yearn it to be.

O Bhrighde! 'tis seaward, the dreamland, the grail track,
O Bhrighde! and seaward the Coolin of Rūm,
Afloat on the dreamtide I'm hearing hill waters
Like laughter of streams by the Coolin of Rūm.

THE ISLE OF ST DONNAN

St Donnan, being on his way to Eigg, the isle of caves and of dark deeds, bethought him to put into Iona, in order to make his confession to the abbot. For once, at any rate, the kingly Colum-cille was humble as a little child, thinking within himself that he was not worthy to be confessor to such an one as Donnan. 'I will not confess thee, Donnan,' he said, 'for I am seeing the red blood of martyrdom about thine eyes.' But the constraint of three was upon Donnan, the constraint of the Evangel, the constraint of fate, and the constraint of his own blood; and to the Isle of Eigg he must needs go, to preach the faith to the herdmen of the Queen of Moydart, to whom pertained the isle as dainty pasture for her brindled cattle. And the Islesfolk heard him gladly. But the Queen of Moydart, hearing the story across the seas, shook her head. 'I am keeping herdmen,' she said, 'to herd my milking cattle on the face of Corravine, and not to be herded themselves by a monk.' And she sent word to them, by coracle, that they must put Donnan, the monk, to death. But that was just the one thing under the sun that the herdmen of Eigg would not do, even for the Queen of Moydart; whereupon, in red-hot rage, she sent a company of her own warrior women across to the isle, to do her bidding. And thus it was that during

mass on a Day of the Lord, in the sixth century, St Donnan, with fifty of the herdmen, entered into the red martyrdom. And at midnight—so the tale—a strange light shone upon his tomb, and voices from above chanted over it a song, some lines of which have come down through fourteen centuries :—

The warm eye o' Christ on the tomb o' Donnan,
The stars so high on the tomb o' Donnan,
The warm eye o' Christ on the tomb o' Donnan
No ill, no ill to the tomb o' Donnan.

The Isle of Eigg, as the sheep know but too well, has its own share of bramble bushes. A hundred years ago, a woman who had a name for thrift, as well as for art, went wool-gathering to those same bramble bushes as regularly as others went dulse-pulling to the shore, and in due time there came out of her loom a web of blues and greens and crotals which a king might envy. Generally, the web went to a neighbour of her own, Iain Og Morragh, who had an eye for art, if not for thrift, and who, like herself, was a weaver, but of song threads blown about by the four winds of heaven. It was he who, standing one day by the tomb of St Donnan, and looking across to the face of Corravine, weaved old threads into new so cunningly that none could tell what of the web was his own and what the angels'. If, after a hundred years, the loosened threads have been

put once more through the loom, it is still the same web that comes out of it : Youth on age, on the face of Corravine.

Milking-cattle on the face o' Corravine,
Dew o' the skies on the face o' Corravine,
Milking-cattle on the face o' Corravine,
Youth for age on the face o' Corravine.

Yonder see I the Isle o' the Deer,
Yonder see I the Scuir to the sky,
Yonder see I the Isle o' the Deer,
The rugged bens o' my love to the sky.

Milking-cattle on the face o' Corravine,
Dew o' the skies on the face o' Corravine,
Milking-cattle on the face o' Corravine,
Youth on age on the face o' Corravine.

Early puts the sun greeting on Stroa,
Early chant the birds the beauty o' Donnan,
Early puts the sun greeting on Stroa,
Early grows the grass on the sheiling o' Donnan.

The warm eye o' Christ on the tomb o' Donnan,
The stars so high on the tomb o' Donnan,
The warm eye o' Christ on the tomb o' Donnan,
No ill, no ill on the tomb o' Donnan.

Milking-cattle on the face o' Corravine,
Dew o' the skies on the face o' Corravine,
Milking-cattle on the face o' Corravine,
Youth is age on the face o' Corravine.

BIRLINN HEALTH-DRINKING CHANT

Far away the mist I see,
Ho la vee o Horin-yo.
Thro' its haze the Isle I love,
Ho la vee o Horin-yo.
Isle of youth whose Bens I see,
Ho la vee o Horin-yo.
E'en the dew upon each blade,
Ho la vee o Horin-yo.
Joy to all who still have life,
Ho la vee o Horin-yo.
Peace to all who sleep in death,
Ho la vee o Horin-yo.
Tho' the skull be on the board,
Ho la vee o Horin-yo.
Joy be ours if near the Shades,
Ho la vee o Horin-yo.

THE CHRIST CHILD

THE CHRIST-CHILD'S LULLABY

There was once a shiftless laddie in the isles who had lost his mother, and that is a sad tale, but had got a stepmother in her place, and that is sometimes a sadder. On an evening there was, he brought home the cattle for the milking, and if they gave little milk that time, and likely it was little they gave, who was to blame for it but the poor orphan! 'Son of another,' said his stepmother in the heat of anger, 'there will be no luck on this house till you leave; but whoever heard of a luckless chick leaving of its own will?' But leave the shiftless laddie did, and that of his own will, and ere the full moon rose at night, he was on the other side of the ben.

That night the stepmother could get neither sleep nor ease; her bed was like a cairn of stones in a forest of reptiles. 'I will rise,' she said, 'and see if the night outside is better than the night inside.' She rose and went out, with her face towards the ben; nor did she stop until she saw and heard something which made her stop. What was this but a Woman, with the very heat-love of Heaven in her face, sitting on a grassy knoll and song-lulling a baby-son with the sweetest music ever heard

under moon or sun ; and at her feet the shiftless laddie, his face like the dream of the Lord's night. "God of the Graces!" said the stepmother, "it is Mary Mother, and she is doing what I ought to be doing—song-lulling the orphan.' And she fell on her knees and began to weep the soft warm tears of a mother ; and when, after a while, she looked up, there was nobody there but herself and the shiftless laddie side by side.

And that is how Christ's Lullaby came to the Isles.

My love, my dear, my darling thou,
My treasure new, my gladness thou,
My comely beauteous babe-son thou,
Unworthy I to tend to thee.

Hosanna to the Son of David,
My King, my Lord, and my Saviour!
Great my joy to be song-lulling thee—
Blessed among the women I.

PUTTING OUT TO SEA

Until a generation ago the folk of Cleeadale in the Isle of Eigg were wont to sing this to the slow rhythmic swing of the stacking of the hay. Not of fields and frolic its theme, but of the birth of a soul.

To one who was there, the knee-woman cried: 'The sea, the sea, thou man who hast come, what is the omen of the sea to-night?' 'The tide is flowing, thou knee-woman, and the springtide of the birds is nearing its height.' 'The Blessings of good tidings be on thee, thou man who hast come. Born was Columcille of my love in the flow of the tide, in the wax of the moon, and the beauteous one was he.' 'True for thee O knee-woman, but so frail the boat, so great yon sea!'

Michael, Sea-Lord, Shield of Light,
To-night a boat puts out to sea,
Hill iu, hill ō.

Broken keel planks strew the shore,
So frail the boat, so great yon sea,
Hill iu, hill ō.

Michael, Sea-Lord, Shield of Light,
To-night a child puts out to sea,
Hill iu, hill ō.

A MOTHER'S SEA CROON

The mist
The drift,
The mist, the mist,

Black the night, high the wind,
Little babe, on the sea ;

Fights the ship with the waves,
Sail nor rudder has she ;

Rocks below, gusts above,
All the dangers that be ;

King of Grace, save our men,
Be they under Thy lee
In the mist,
In the drift,
In the mist, in the mist.

To thy sleep, little child,
Sails the Christ on the sea
In the mist,
In the drift,
In the mist, in the mist.

ST BRIDE'S BIRD

On a skerry, in ebb-tide, sat the Christ; through the *bealach*, the mountain pass, came His enemies. A sea-bird, the oyster-catcher, looking on, said within himself, 'Yon shall not be; I will put wandering on the evil men.' And he went and covered his Lord with sea-tangle. For remembrance, it was in the mind of St Michael, and he the warden of the sea, to put the whiteness of an angel on the oyster-catcher. But St Bride of the Isles, Foster-mother of Christ, put in her word, 'Let the bird that saved my Child be just as He was, but with a touch of whiteness on him, for remembrance.' Ever since, when St Bride's Bird is on the wing, the touch of whiteness on him, as of an angel, is seen of all eyes, as though a cross.

The Sea-gull, in the Isles, is the carrier between the Land-under-waves and the Land-of-the-Living. The Skylark is the songster of the Virgin Mary. And St Bride's Bird, being the servant of the Foster-mother, keeps a warm eye on little children.

In the Isle of Eigg, long ago, three little motherless children were playing on the white sands of Laig Bay, long after all the other little ones of the township had been mothered to sleep. As they played, what espied one of the three but a coracle tied to a rock. 'Her prow to the sea!' cried the little one, 'let's now

play at being sea-reivers.' And, climbing into the coracle, they set her adrift on the out-going tide, singing the while, as the like of them should, bold reiving songs. But as midnight drew near and the giant hills of Rūm loomed over them, the reiver heart oozed out, and the child heart throbbed with fear. But the warm eye was not asleep. And quietly over the waves came Bride, the Foster-mother, answering the call of her sea-bird ; and from an armful of the moorland cannach she took the soft white tufts, and with them made a bed for the motherless three. And as she guided the coracle, on the inflowing tide, back to Laig Bay, she lulled them to sleep with a croon which, it is said, put the warm tears on the eyes of her own sea-bird.

U-vil ! u-vil !
Motherless three,
Cold and weary,
U-vil ! u-vil !

ST BRIDE'S CHILD-BATHING CROON

Oh joy, oh rapture !
Dear my child !
Bride be washing thee
Laving, cleansing thee.

Oh joy, oh rapture !
Dear my child !
As washed she as cleansed she the Christ-child,
Laveth she thee.

Oh joy ! oh rapture !
Dear my child !
In water from well of King David,
Laveth she thee.

O joy ! oh rapture !
Dear my child !
In water with fragrance of angels,
Laveth she thee.
As Jesus the Christ Child,
Laveth she thee.

THE HARPER

The Islesfolk did well to have reverence for the wind and the sea! The wonderful things always drifted from the other shore. And beyond the furthest away isle there was still another.

A player on the harp who had spent the thrice seven years in the schools of Erin and of Alba, found in his creek, one morning, a little lost child who had come out of the sea and the night. He played tunes to her; some for the healing, some for the sleeping, and one for the going. But a whisper went through the Isles that it was the player himself who wandered away in the little child, and that it was the little child who lived on in the harper. At any rate, his tunes would now be putting wonder on the people. They would be closing the doors lest any of his music should escape. And at last they would find themselves in a sleep-boat, putting out to sea afresh.

No door be open
Lest flee yon music;
Nor cease thy harping
So sweet and calming;
Thou King of harping,
Ne'er cease thy music.

My barge is sailing
On seas of youth-bliss;
Thou King of harping,
Ne'er cease thy music.

THE SKĪR OF ST KENNETH

It was the year of the Black Frost in the Skīr of St Kenneth, when the ice, which on Christmas Eve but covered the quiet pools, was by Eastertide creeping upward and downward on the very face of the waterfalls themselves. It was the year too of the dead birds, there being never a bit of softness anywhere big enough to let the beak of a little bird through to the worms below—and, O King of the elements, pity the poor when each tuft of earth is alike for hardness. And day after day the Clerk who was tending the Skīr scattered grain out of the lean barns on whatsoever tuft a little bird was likely to light upon, until one day he cried out, 'Sorrow upon me, it is either the folks themselves or else the birds that must die.' And on that same evening, taking to the road to keep himself warm, he saw one like unto a monk standing on a hillock near to the church of St Kenneth, with a flock of birds flying around him. 'Who art thou, stranger, and what thine errand?' asked the Clerk. 'I am he whose name is on yonder church, and I am giving Communion to the birds before they die.' 'Please God, holy man, they shall not die. I myself will feed them.' 'And the song of the birds will be in thine own heart, good Clerk, and be it known unto thee that a full week before the lean barns are empty, the Good Being will send his soft wind from the West to put growth and greenness on the Skīr of St Kenneth.'

VOW SONG OF THE BIRDS

Haleluia, praise ye ever him !
Ho halovi, chall o,
Sing the birds His praise song heavenwards,
Haleluia, Haleluia,
Ho halovi chall o.

Hide the Christ when envy follows Him,
Ho halovi chall o,
Pull the thorns from out His hallowed brow,
Ho halovi chall o.
Sing the birds His praise song heavenwards,
Haleluia, Haleluia,
Ho halovi chall o.

Pull the thorns from out His hallowed brow,
Ho halovi chall o !
Feed His poor when hunger harrows them,
Ho halovi chall o !
Sing the birds his praise song heavenwards,
Haleluia, Haleluia,
Ho halovi chall o !

SONGS OF LABOUR

SONGS OF LABOUR

In the Hebrides labour and song went hand in hand: labour gave rise to song, and song lightened labour. In this book specimens are given of songs associated with spinning, waulking, milking and rowing. Apart altogether from their musical value, they are of interest as a characteristic element in a life which is fast passing away. Labour is now being more and more divorced from song, and in the course of a very few years the folk will be surprised to hear that their fathers and mothers once used song as a substitute for steam and electricity! One reason is that labour itself is changing: in its old forms it was suited to song: in its new forms the noise of machinery is its music. The quern, for instance, is never used now except in a case of emergency in the outlying isles, and with the quern has disappeared some of the prettiest Gaelic croons. Likewise, patent churns impoverish equally the lilts and the buttermilk, and once sanitary law has forbidden hand-milking and home-waulking (or, at any rate, 'human' waulking!) the last link between song and labour will have been snapped.

It is hardly necessary to say that the measure and the time of the labour-songs are suited to

the special kind of work involved. In the spinning-song, for instance, 'the long drawn out gradually accelerating phrase culminating in a long pause, is evoked by the periodic rhythm of the spinning itself.' The wool is carded into 'rolls or rowans' (Gaelic *rolag*), and the time of the song is really determined by the spinner's manipulation of the rolls. As a rule, the spinner is singing the verse and the short chorus as she stretches out her hand for another roll, joins it to the end of the spun one, and gets into the swing of the spinning : this done, the wheel and the long chorus go merrily together, gradually getting quicker, till the spinner, prolonging a note, stretches out as far as her right hand can reach what remains of the roll, and then, with a *hithillean beag cha la o hill iù ra bhò*, runs it through to the bobbin.

Of the labour-songs which survive, the ones used for waulking, for fulling the home-spun cloth, are the most numerous and the most varied. The theme may be love or war or the praise of a chief, or even a tragedy such as *The Sea-Sorrow* : any song, indeed, may be used for waulking, provided the verse is sufficiently short and the chorus sufficiently long. Many of the old Ossianic ballads have been adapted for the purpose, each line forming a verse, followed by a chorus : the result being that ballads which might otherwise have been lost have been thus preserved, though in every case the diction has been greatly simplified and modernised in the

process. There are, of course, different songs for different stages of the waulking, and the stages vary from two or three at a 'little' waulking to anything up to twelve at a 'big' waulking. The writer has noted the following well-defined stages at Hebridean waulkings within the last twenty years:—(1) Fairly slow songs—*òrain-teasa-chaidh*, 'heating-songs'—to give the woman time to get into the swing of the work. (2) Lively songs—*òrain-teannachaidh*, 'tightening-songs'—to break the back of the work. (3) Frolic-songs—*orain-shùgraidh*—to give the maidens a chance of avowing or disavowing their sweethearts. (4 and 5) Stretching and clapping songs—*a' sìneadh 's a' baslachadh an aodaich*—to make certain that the cloth is of even breadth. (6) The consecration of the cloth—*coisrigeadh an aodaich.* (7) Folding songs—*a' coinnleachadh an aodaich.* As the consecration of the cloth is now practically a thing of the past, a specimen of the chants used may be given—

The sunwise turn once.
The sunwise turn twice,
The sunwise turn thrice,
} Suiting the action to the words.

The sun to the Western Sea,
Mankind to the Holy Three
In each deed for aye and aye,
And in the gladnesses.

The blessing of the Lord on this cloth,
May the heroes wear it, enjoy it,
By sea, by land, in the changes
Of mighty waves.

One song on it,
Two songs,
Three songs,
And may there be sewed to it never
But music-laughter of maidens,
Honey-kisses of fair ones
And singing ones—
And that sufficeth !

It may be added that, in the case of the frolic-songs, verses were improvised in which the name of each maiden present was coupled with that of her sweetheart, to whom some slighting allusion was invariably made : and the maiden, in her reply, was expected to resent this and to praise the slighted one up to the skies. Sometimes, however, either from want of will or want of pluck in the maiden (in the Hebrides it could hardly have been lack of poetic talent !) the young man was left unpraised and unsung, the result being civil war in the township, and breaking of hearts, if not of heads.

SPINNING SONG

Hù rù rithill iu riu-a-ro hi rithill iu
Rithill-o ro-a-ro hi rithill ithill o hiu a ro ro
bha ho!
Hithillean beag cha la o, hill iu ra bho.

Love gave I to thee, my lover,
Hithillean beag cha la o, hill iu ro bho
Love that sister ne'er gave brother.
Hù rù rithill iu riu-a-ro hi rithill iu
Rithill-o ro-a-ro hi rithill ithill o hiu a ro ro
bha ho!
Hillean beag cha la o, hill iu ra bho.

Love that sister ne'er gave brother,
Hithillean beag, etc.
To her loved one, ne'er gave mother.
Hù rù rithill iu, etc.

Thou the wheel and I the thread, Ho
Hithillean beag, etc.
White fate spinning o'er our head Ho,
Hù rù rithill iu, etc.

THE COCKLE GATHERER

Joy scream of sea-gulls
Down on the skerry there,
Joy-scream of sea-gulls
While I gather cockles here.

Laughter of sea-waves
Down on the skerry there,
Laughter of sea-waves
While I gather cockles here.

I dal a, du vil
I dal a, du ho ro
I dal a, du vil
Blythe I gather cockles here.

THE FAIRY LOOM

The mavis in yonder boor
Weaves weel her melodie,
Ye're bathin' in caller dew,
Gin ye lo'e her melodie.

Her dear wee lute, sae clear it's oot,
Weaves weel her melodie,
Her dear wee lute's a fairy loom,
Gin ye lo'e her melodie.

RŌDEL FISHING RUNE

Stolen hook and
Hairy line and
Crooked rod of
Rowan wood
New found on shore-land
On the Lord's day.

Wind from homeland !
Out to sea ye !
Love on Colum,
Love on Clement !
Sure to-night we'll light up Rōdel.
Hook a ree-oo
Hook a ree-oo
Hook a ree-oo
Ee-oo, ee-oo.

HERDMAN NIGHT

Night is a good Herdman. He brings all creatures home
(Gaelic Proverb)

The folk of the Isles, a labour brotherhood of men and women, are more or less willing thralls to Master Day. In the morning he sends out the women, with their crook-spades, into the field, or sets them to grind the barley and knead the dough for little mouths : and with the ebbing tide he sends the men, with their nets and lines, out to sea. But Night, the good herdman, bringeth all creatures home, the men from the sea, and the women from the field. And in due time, mindful of their schooling, he leads them, with the freshness of the burn upon them, to the hearth around which the ceilidh is wont to meet. And then it is song for the song and tale for the tale, spinning of wool and weaving of heath-rope, until the peats begin to lose themselves in the ashes. Once in a while, too, if luck is about, Herdman Night, coming upon the boats of other Isles in the open sea, brings them all, for their own good, into the *cala*, the harbour, where sits the ceilidh that never gets tired of him. And while the wind is blowing outside, little children, sitting at the feet of men from the sea, hear the many strange things which, on a day to come, they will sing or recite to some lucky one who is on errantry for those same strange things. So bringeth Night, the

good herdman, even the songs and the tales home.

Ho-ro-ee !
The sea-mew cries
Ho-ro-ee ! Ho-ro-ee ! Ho-ro-ee !
Sends Master Day his thralls to sea.
Ho-ro-ee ! Pull strong, lads,
Far out to sea.

Ho-ro-ee !
St Bride's Bird cries.
Ho-ro-ee ! Ho-ro-ee ! Ho-ro-ee !
Calls Herdman Night his children home,
Ho-ro-ee ! Pull strong, lads,
God speed you home !

THE SONG OF THE LINN-QUERN

The Gaelic byword says that ' Second sight comes from the blood, second hearing from the blindness.'

A blind woman of Uist was wont to go out each evening, with the township lads, to bring the cattle home to the milking—she having the ear to hear, and they the eye to see, where the cattle would be. One evening, the lowing being far away, the lads set forward towards it, and the blind woman laid her fatigue by the side of a linn. And here the strange thing happened—what came out of the linn but beautiful music, the lilt, laughing, leaping, frolicking, of two

water-fairies busy at the quern-grinding. When the blind woman went home that night, she had a tale to tell and a song to sing in the township ; and each day, anew, she told that same tale and sang that same tune, morning noon, and evening. 'Foolishness is on thee,' said the other women; 'dost thou not know that it is ever forbidden to sing what the fairies sing, and to tell what the fairies tell? Sure, the black-sorrow will come on the heel of thy foolishness.' And perhaps the black sorrow did come—if it was not white-joy instead!—at any rate, one morning the blind woman went out, and in the evening she returned not. And the township women said : 'To-night there will be three of them singing the Song of the Linn-quern.'

Ho ro, hi ri, ri ri,
Little roe-deer,
Hear'st thou the linn a-querning?

Ho ro, hi ri, ri ri,
Little need'st fear pulse of grinding,
Music of querning in the linn,
Ho ro, hi ri, ri ri,
As it laughs and leaps and frolics,
Ho ro, hi ri, ri ri.

A MOTHER'S MILKING CROON

Sil, a bho, sil am bainne,
Gie your milk or sweet cream,
Sil, a bho, sil am bainne,
By your leave, be it cream.

Sil, a bho, sil am bainne,
Sweet cream may it be,
Good cream for the drinking
O' the lads at the sea.

Sil, a bho, sil am bainne,
From machair, from moor,
Sweet cream for the drinking
O' the bairns by the shore.

Sil, a bho, sil am bainne,
For the bairns by the shore.

HEARTLING OF MY HEART

A MILKING PLAINT

A-moaning thou,
My own dear one,
A-moaning thou,
Heartling Heart.
'Mong yon cattle on the meadow
See'st yon calfling by its mother led.

Hey-hólican,
My own dear one,
Hey-hólican,
Heartling heart.
See'st yon bramble-bush a-near her,
Bending laden with its berries red.

One cause of sorrow
Thou, my dear one,
My Heartling Heart
Links me to thee,
Keening thou thy calf, thy dear one,
Keening I my son 'neath the sea.

Hey hólikan,
My own dear one,
Hey hólikan,
Heartling Heart.

THE ASPEN-TREE

There is more wisdom, says the Gael, in the bird-world than in the folk-world! Men fling their curses at the aspen-tree because wicked people made the Cross out of its wood, but the birds nest in its branches because, for shame of a deed which it could not help, it has ever since trembled in all its leaves.

Within the Rough Bounds, and half-way between St Finnan's Isle and Shūna, there is a

hidden glen which, in the olden days, was bare of all trees save one venerable aspen. On Good Friday, at sunset, the people of the shore and the hill clachans would march in procession to that aspen-tree, and forming themselves into a circle around it, would solemnly chant its curse to it. And in the coming and going of the years, the accursed aspen-tree became a sacred symbol, around which Christian and pagan, hand in hand, bore witness against such as crucify the beautiful and the good, not knowing what they do.

A curse on thee, thou aspen-tree,
The King o' bens was nailed to thee ;
Upon the blade a black curse be
And on his hand who set it free.

A curse on thee, hard aspen-tree,
The King o' grace was nailed to thee ;
The love of men and angels He
Whose blood flowed down from yonder tree.

A curse on thee, thou aspen-tree ;
A curse that thou should'st ever be ;
A curse on whose-so eye may see
And will not curse with me yon tree.

THE RUNE OF THE WEAVER

The woman was in the sea-shore pulling the limpets, and what saw she but a wreath of mist, whiter than snow, gliding towards her from the far East. When she looked again, what saw she this time but a glow of light in the very centre of the wreath—and when she looked up the third time, who was in yonder glow of light but the Weaver, weaving his Rune. 'O Mother of God, is it not the beautiful thing, the rune that is woven of the tears and the laughter.'

O Loom of Love,
Weave thy Rune ;
Loom of Love by lone waves,
O Loom of Love,
Weave thy Rune.

Thou art the laughter, thou art the tears,
O Rune by lone waves woven,
Thou art the song, and thou art the pain,
O Rune by lone waves woven.

O Loom of Love,
Weave thy Rune ;
Loom of Love by lone waves,
O Loom of Love.

Weave thy Rune,
By lone waves,
Weave, weave.

PEAT FIRE SMOORING PRAYER

Smoor the fire, smoor the fire,
Smoor the fire as wanes the cruiskeen,
Jesu, guide us through the sleep-land.
Smoor the fire, smoor the fire,
Jesu, Lord, and drown wi' tears
Fires o' rage, where sleep lies wounded,
Fires o' rage, where sleep lies wounded,
Raging fires, raging fires.
God the Father, guard my child,
Where meet swords, where death is keening;

Hear my cry, Hear my cry!
Mary Mother Hear my cry!
On Thy knee, a child was cooing,
On Thy knee, a child was cooing.
Hear my cry! Hear my cry!
Arm o' smiting, Sword o' wounding,
Stay thou the hand, stay thou the wound,
Mary, hear a mother's prayer.

THE DEATH CROON

THE DEATH CROON

In the days of the old Celtic church, the Death-croon was chanted over the dying by the *anam-chara,* the soul-friend, assisted by three chanters. Later on, the rite passed into the hands of *seanairean a' bhaile,* the elders of the township, and the *mnathan-tuiridh,* the mourning-women, the latter eventually developing into a professional class, whose services could always be obtained for a consideration. In more recent times, the *bean-ghluin,* the knee-woman, the midwife, was also the *bean-tuiridh,* the mourning-woman, and as the friend of the folk in the coming and the going of life, was regarded with the greatest veneration both by young and by old. To this day the knee-woman of the isles chants her runes and celebrates her mysteries in the houses of birth and death, but always with closed doors—metaphorically, at any rate. As recently as eighteen years ago, a Death-croon was chanted over a dying person in the island of Eigg.

The mist the dew,
The dew the mist,
The mist the dew

In the eye of my love,
In the eye of my love.
Thou who didst open the young eye,
Close it to-night in the sleep of death,
In the sleep of death.

From the nineteenth to the sixth century is a far cry, but the Death-croon brings the two together. St Donnan of Eigg and fifty of his *muinntir*, his disciples, had suffered martyrdom at the hands of the Queen of the Isle, and were sleeping their first night's death-sleep in the churchyard now known as *Cill-Donnain*. At midnight *solus an àigh*, a blessed light, was seen above the graves, and voices were heard chanting a croon of which only a few lines have been handed down.

Early gives the sun greeting to Donnan,
Early sings the bird the greatness of Donnan,
Early grows the grass on the grave of Donnan,
The warm eye of Christ on the grave,
The stars of the heavens on the grave,
No harm, no harm to Donnan's dust.

And said the old folk of Eigg : The Queen and her maidens saw the light and heard the singing and, way of the women ! wonder brought them towards the churchyard. And, sure, there must have been *tàladh*, fascination, in the light, for as *it* would move *they* would follow, and did it

not bring them little by little, and not little was that same little, to the loch you know yourself, the one in which the *each-uisge*, the water-horse, lives—and, O Mary Mother, was it not there the judgment was!

In the isles the black loch among the hills is always associated with death and unholy deeds and croons. The sea, with its ebb and its flow, is suggestive of life. If it has the terrible strength, it has also the nobility, of the lion. But the loch among the hills is a snake—black and slimy, with death in its eye. A tale and a croon will tell the rest.

On a night there was, it befell a *pears-eaglais*, a cleric, to be returning from the hill to the shore-clachan, and what came upon him but the weather of the seven elements—and what can be worse than that! Since he could not do better, he did the best he could, and his only choice being an evil, he took shelter in a cave under a rock. He had not been long there when a great white lightning sudden-flashed before his two eyes, and in the glare he saw a deep black loch between two precipices; and O Blessed Being of the Graces! beside the loch was a man in the death-throe, and three wizards crooning over him—a lean black wizard, a bald grey wizard, and a sleek yellow wizard.

Said the lean black wizard :—

Torture, torture, man that be!
Over there, over there,

Thou shalt be bound, thou shalt be bound,
Wasps to-day, midges to-morrow,
Eating thee, itching thee, tumouring thee,
Over there, over there,
Man that be.

Said the bald grey wizard :

Torture, torture, man that be !
Over there, over there,
Thou shalt be bound, thou shalt be bound,
A raven above thee, a thistle in thine eye,
A venom-serpent coming nigh, coming nigh,
Over there, over there,
Man that be.

Said the sleek yellow wizard :

Torture, torture, man that be !
Over there, over there,
Thou shalt be bound, thou shalt be bound,
Wind a-freezing through the willows,
Stinging cold like scalding water,
Over there, over there,
Man that *was*.

And while the wizards were at the croon, the cleric was making the *caim*, the sacred circle, round about himself ; and once he had made the picture of the Cross on it and blessed it in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, he knew then that no evil could come upon him, howsoever long till cock-crow—but for all that,

O man of my heart, the loch was deep and the loch was black!

From the hills, the last refuge of paganism, the Death-croon leads us to the sea and the Iona coracles. A world of years ago (said an old Eigg woman), long, long before Prince Charlie landed in Moidart, the folk there were fierce and dark and ignorant; they kept *Bealltainn*, Beltane, better than Christmas or Easter Sunday, and (O Mary Mother, sain us from evil!) it is said they would even be praying to the serpents. Columba of my love heard of this, and it gave him a sore heart that people should be so far in their own light as to turn their back on heaven and the saints—sure, he was ever the *àilleagan*, the beauteous-one, son of a king and grandson of a king, and he might have been a king himself, had that been his wish—but to get back to my tale, he sent two of his monks to Moidart to teach the folk there the good Christian ways of the church. But were they not the foolish ones, the folk of Moidart! They would not listen to the monks, and at last the younger of the two said: 'We will return to Iona and leave the seven curses of the church on Moidart.' In the dusk of the evening the two were down on the shore, with their coracle in sailing trim, and something in their faces which no wise person would wish to see. 'I hear the dip of oars,' said the younger one, 'and the sound is making for the point further down.' Wonder soon brought them to

the spot, and what they saw was a coracle gliding away into the darkness, a lady-lord clothed in white lying on the strand, and a baby boy sucking a cold breast. And the older monk began to chant the Death-croon over the dead, but I do not know what the words were, for it is said he never chanted that croon again, but always a better one. Before he was through with it, the eyes of the baby boy were upon him. 'She is not dead,' said the little one, 'but she always loses life and milk when the monks of Iona lose their heat-love for the folk.' What more? O treasure of my heart, miserable creatures like us may not know what passed between the Blessed Mary and her Son and the monks of Iona—but, at any rate, the two men returned to their coracle and made a hole in her.

Home thou'rt going to-night to the Winter Ever-house
The Autumn, Summer, and Springtide Ever-house,
Home art going to-night on music of cantors,
White angels wait thee on the shores of the Avon.

God the Father with thee in sleep,
Jesus Christ with thee in sleep,
God the Spirit with thee in sleep.

Softly sleep, softly sleep.

Sleep oh love on Mother's bosom,
Sleep while she sings soft lullings to thee,

The sleep of the Son on Mary's bosom,
Sleep and put off from thee ev'ry woe.

Sleep and put off from thee ev'ry woe,
Sleep and put off from thee ev'ry woe.

Youth sleep of Jesus,
Life-sleep of Jesus,
Glory sleep of Jesus,
Sleep and put from thee thy ev'ry woe,
Sleep and put off from thee ev'ry woe.

Love-sleep of Jesus,
Joy-sleep of Jesus,
Peace-sleep of Jesus,
Sleep and put from thee thy ev'ry woe,
Sleep and put off from thee ev'ry woe.

Sleep of seven virtues on thee,
Sleep of seven moons upon thee,
Sleep of seven slumbers on thee.

Softly sleep, softly sleep, free from woe,
Softly sleep, softly sleep, free from woe.

Dream of Mary and God in her side,
Dream of Columba in sainted Isle,
Dream of the one that was ever a child ;

All these dreamings, dear love, be thine,
All these dreamings, dear love, be thine,
All these dreamings, dear love, be thine.

The dusk of the Death-sleep is, love, in thine eye,
But softly thou'lt sleep, softly thou'lt sleep.

In the name of the Three in One, Peace to thy pain,
The Christ is come, thou'rt at peace from all pain,
O the Christ is come, thou'rt at peace from all pain.

Softly to sleep, softly to sleep,
Softly to sleep, softly to sleep.

COLUMBA AND IONA

THE RUNE OF COLUM-CILLE

Generations ago, the Rune of Colum-cille, words and tune, sailed forth from Iona to the other Isles. In the changes of wind and tide the two seem to have lost sight of each other, the words ultimately drifting to St Donnan's Isle of Eigg, the tune to the little Isle of Eriskay, further west. But whoso awaiteth the ferry long enough will get across sometime, and the two separated ones, words and tune, are now speaking each other again, in safe anchorage.

'There was never a wand in the door of Iona,' and one day a druid, from beyond the Moyle, landed in Port na Curach, to put testing on the magic which, if men spoke truth, had come in coracles from Erin to Iona. Above the shore he came face to face with one of the monks : Baithen of the tender heart, perhaps. 'Tell me, holy man, how I shall know Colum-cille in the seeing, if see him I should.' 'If see a man thou shouldest, O stranger, with the head of a King on him, and the look of a King, it is himself thou wilt likely be seeing : and if, moreover, he should be healing the broken wing of a bird, it is not someone else thou wilt be seeing then.' 'May good be with thee, holy man, but tell me, if thou mayest, what the magic,

be it black or white, of this same Colum-cille.' 'Thou wilt hear it in the rune and in the song, O stranger from beyond the sea, and when thou hearest, it is upon thyself the great sorrow will be, that there is never a wand in the door of Iona, so that thou mightest dwell here all thy days.'

While this book was being made, one stood by the well of Colum-cille, in the Isle of Eigg. 'Let us drink of its water,' said a fisher lad of the Isle, 'and may our share of Colum-cille take us safely across.'

Hear ye my Rune from the blue deeps of far days,
Sang and flushed Iona's heart;
Columkeel hath the keen eye of eagle,
So to seek the noon-tide of nine rays.

Hear ye my Rune from the blue deeps of far days,
Sang and throbbed Iona's heart;
Columkeel hath the strong back of elk-stag,
So to bear all our people's burdens.

Hear ye my Rune from the blue deeps of far days,
Sang and thrill'd Iona's heart;
Columkeel hath the soft hand of woman
So to soothe the sore wounds of bruised ones.

THOU GRAIL-LIT ISLE

Blue of wave, of hills afar,
Sheen of sand upon the shore,
Night but shrouds them till the dawn
Shall our holden eyes restore.

I-mo-chree, my heart's own isle,
Where monks intoned, now cattle low :
Yet ere hills shall pass away,
Thine altar lights again shall glow.

Where Colum healed the broken wing,
Where he dared the wind-swept kyle,
Where he wondered like a child,
Gleams my holy deathless isle.

I-mo-chree, my heart's own shrine,
Where only lives what seemed to die,
I-mo-chree, thou Grail-lit Isle,
Ebb-tide, flow-tide, Christ is nigh.

ST COLUMBA'S LINN

St Columba's Linn, in the Isle of Eigg, being fed by a burn running through peat-moss, gets smaller and smaller in the days of drought, but never quite dries up. There are always tiny runlets trickling over the rock into the linn—just enough to baptize the children and keep the Faith alive, until the showers fall. In the

number of these tricklets there are meanings. Are there nine ? The child baptized under them becomes strong and beautiful as the nine rays of the sun, or as the ninth wave, the wave of healing, on the Laig Strand after full tide. Are there seven ? The child becomes a rover and adventurer, seeing through the weather of the seven elements the wonders of the seven days and the many seven years. Are there three tricklets ? The child becomes like unto the Iona ones through the mystic symbol of the Triune, and has the knowledge of the three Kingdoms, earth and sea and sky. But even in Eigg the numbers are not always sacred and then the child grows up to be a common man, neither better nor worse than his neighbours, doing his day's work in the field or on the sea, with a place finally in St Donnan's Churchyard.

THE WHITE STRAND

Where the ninth ray of healing
  Falls on the sheen-white strand at noon-tide,
There shall I vow me !
    Hug ho rionn o.

Where the ninth wave of healing
  Breaks on the sheen-white strand at moon-tide,
There shall I vow me !
    Hug ho rionn o.

GILLĪOSA, SERVANT OF JESUS

There was once a laddie in the Isles and the longing of his heart was, to sail across to Iona to get greeting, if greeting he might get, from Columba the Beloved.

One day, as he sat with his eye on the wake of the boats, who uprose quietly by his side but one who had the look and the speech of a gentleman. 'Laddie in the longing,' asked he, 'what would you give to a man who should sail you across in a coracle to Iona?' 'Sure,' said the laddie, 'I would be his servant for evermore.' Before the words were well out of his mouth, the coracle was afloat, and they were both in her, with her prow to the sea. And so swift and straight was her going to Iona that the wind behind her could only get a little glimpse of her now and again.

'Praise to the Good Being!' cried the laddie, as the coracle put her prow again to the home shore, 'I have seen Iona, and I have got the fine greeting from the warm eye of Columba the Beloved.' 'And it is now meet,' said the gentleman, 'that you should pay the price'—and as he spoke, his feet began to change into the cloven hoofs. The laddie, with the hint of a smile on his face, took out of his bosom a holy candle which he had got from one of the monks of Iona, and he lit one end of it. 'By your leave, gentleman,' said he, 'may I be

the servant of Jesus, like Columba the Beloved, until the candle burn out ?' 'It is too long,' said the gentleman. The laddie then lit the other end of the candle. 'Until it burn out now ?' said he. 'It is little enough to ask or to give,' said the gentleman, now quite sure of his prey. But the laddie forthwith blew out both ends of the candle and put it back into his bosom. 'By your leave, gentleman, it shall never now burn out while I live.' 'I am thinking,' said the gentleman, laughing softly to himself and vanishing in flame, 'I am thinking that Jesus has got an artful servant!'

THE GRAIL GALLEY

The Islesman, in his Grail-tracking, puts out to sea ; in a Barge, too, which is unto him according to his longing, and according to his vow. But as the Gaelic has it, 'So frail the boat, so vast the sea!' And he who is wise with the wisdom of a hundred storms will have two tillers to his rudder : the Art of the Druids for the luck of wind, and the Faith of Iona for the stilling of the waves. And for the young the *cala*, the haven, is in the *Eilean Uaine*, the Green Isle, the place where all the good that has not been shall be ; and for the aged it is in *Tir-nan-og*, the Land of Youth, the place where all the good that has been shall be again. But be the course what it may, the two Barges will,

at fall of night, speak each other off the same shore.

Love and longing sail her westward,
Lui lō,
Where may rest each wish a-seeking,
Lui lō.

The truth of Iona be in her saining,
In her going,
The art of the Druids be in her course,
In her windwarding,
When the roar of the waves is fear unto her,
When the blackness and the tempest do her wander,
Hō rō, lui lō.

Westward goes she to the Green Isle,
The quiet haven of the tired, the wandering,
Where Grail-drinks the vow,
The vow of the dreamer,
Hō rō, lui lō.

IONA BOAT SONG

Iomair o, 'illean-mhara,
Iomair o.
Isle of deeps, where death ne'er weepeth,
Sails to thee a king who sleepeth,
With thy saints the Tryst he keepeth,
Iomair o, 'illean-mhara,
Iomair o.

THE IONA RAINBOW

(Sung by St Columba and his monks when putting out to sea)

O Lord of the Heights, whose eye encircles
The land and the sea, and smiles through the thunder,
Smile on us too, as sail we outward
To far blue Isles, with tales of the Wonder.

Beyond those waves, strong hearts are longing
For Heaven's own dream, sweet sounds of the Psalter;
Fair be our breeze, as bear we onward
Our Christ and our Cross, our song and our altar.

Iona shall grow mid far-off oak-trees,
The oak-trees shall hear of Love thou awakest;
Aloft in the sky we see thy Rainbow:
The Druid thou mad'st, the Saint thou re-makest.

Beside thy waves our hearts shall praise thee
For wind and for tide, for share of life's danger;
'Tis well if at eve we make our homeland,
'Tis well if we sleep the sleep of the stranger.

SAY, THOU WEAVER—

TO PATUFFA KENNEDY-FRASER ON HER MARRIAGE

Weave, *a-roon-ghil!*
Love the Weaver
Weaves her web of blue and sea-gray.
Weave, *a-roon-ghil!*
Say, thou weaver,
Weaves thy loom the true-love dream.

By the moonlit isles they're sailing
On the barge of youth and yearning
Who in gray life hear the Grail-song—
Say, *ah-chree,* if there thy dream.

Where the child-heart makes the music,
Where the sea has learned her luring,
Where on souls there falls the dew-drop—
Say, *ah-chree,* if there thy dream.

Weave, *a-roon-ghil!*
Love the Weaver
Weaves her web of blue and sea-gray,
Weave, *a-roon-ghil!*
Say, thou weaver,
Weaves thy loom Iona's Dream.

ANCIENT PRE-CHRISTIAN HEROIC

DEIRDRE

WHOSE STORY IS ONE OF THE THREE SORROWS OF STORY-TELLING

The Gael, in his high mood, thinks of Deirdre for beauty, Bride for goodness, and Mary Macleod for song, and through the eyes of these gets to know the rapture of sorrow.

The King of Erin had the wish to marry Deirdre, loveliest of the women of Gaeldom, but Deirdre herself had no will save for the youthful Naoise, who had the looks, if not the name, of a King. To get beyond the anger of the King of Erin, Deirdre and Naoise fled secretly to Alba, the Scotland that was to be, and they built their bridal hold in Glen Eite, the glen which is a cattle-fold for sunbeams. On a day there was, who came across the sea but a messenger from the King, bidding them now return in honour and friendship. In her woman's heart, Deirdre doubted ; Naoise trusted in the honour of a King. But as their boat was leaving the shores of Alba, Deirdre, knowing without knowing that they were sailing into the sorrow, sang this Farewell to Scotland, that still puts love and warmth into all big hearts.

DEIRDRE'S FAREWELL TO SCOTLAND

Dearest Albyn, Land o'er yonder,
Thou dear land of wood and wave,
Sore my heart that I must leave thee,
But 'tis Naoise I may not leave.

O Glen Eite! O Glen Eite!
Where they builded my bridal hold,
Beauteous glen, in early morning
Flocks of sunbeams crowd thy fold.

Glen da Rua! Glen da Rua!
My love on all whose mother thou,
From a cliff-tree called a cuckoo,
And methinks I hear him now.
Glen da Rua, Glen da Rua!

CUCHULLAN AND HIS SON

First in time and first in prowess among the heroes of the Gael, Cuchullan is the Sun arising.

Trained to the skill of arms, in the Isle of Skye, by Queen Sgathach and her warrior women, he went forth to the wars of Erin, nor remembered that he had left wife and child behind him. In red anger, Aife the Dour put her son under the spell, 'In the day of thy manhood, meet him thou shalt in the deadly combat,

nor tell who thou art.' In the hour of fate, father and son met. The son, knowing, sent his spear shaft foremost. The father, not knowing, sent his spear point foremost. And the son fell.

Under a solitary tree, many hills away, the father, knowing, kept the death-watch over his only son:

Woe is me ! my son a-keening,
Loud o'er the moor my wail-cry !
Clanging thy shield and flame-keen sword
Who lieth asleep in death cold.

Be my curse upon thee, Aife,
Weaving thy spells o' hating,
Thou didst wile him to his doom,
A-seeking Cuchullan of great feats.

Woe is me ! my son a-keening,
Loud o'er the moors my wail-cry !
Cuchullan has slain Cuchullan's son,
Now lying asleep in death cold.

For days no bird dared perch on the tree. But one day a raven perched. And the folk said: Cuchullan is dead.

THE STORY OF MAEVE

Maeve, the strong, had knowledge how to love and how to hate, and when hope slipped out of her love, a thought came to her from a black slimy cave in her heart—'My daughter may have the love of Fraoch, but I will have his life.' Into fell sickness she went, and nevermore would she let healing on herself unless she got her fair palmful of the rowan-berries from the Dragon-isle in the Cold Cold Pool. Nor must hand be at the plucking of them save the hand of Fraoch alone. Across the waters of the Cold Cold Pool swam the hero, and while the Beast was in sleep, he plucked from the rowan tree a cluster of the healing berries and brought them back to Maeve the strong. 'No deed at all is this,' said she, 'a hero's offering would have been the tree itself, fruit and branch and root.' Back again, through the waters of the Cold Cold Pool, swam the hero, and he tore the tree, fruit and branch and root, out of the earth, and with the crash and splash of sand and stone against heath and water, the sleeping Beast awoke—and, och, the sigh of him! never a knife had Fraoch. But further goes the sigh than the shout, and the sigh of Fraoch made its way a-winging to the heart of the daughter of Maeve, and she took the track of the birds to the shore, and through the waters of the Cold Cold Pool, with a knife of gold for the hand of Fraoch. In the keenness

of the blade there was death—death also in the teeth and the claws of the Beast. And the sigh of a friend by the side of the Cold Cold Pool is for a woman's jealousy and a hero's death.

THE DAUGHTER OF MAEVE

The tale of the jealous love of Queen Maeve
For Fraoch, son of Feeach, of the keen-edged blades.

Came love sickness fell, fell,
To Maeve, the Queen of o'er-flowing horns.
Put she knowledge o't on Fraoch,
Straight sought the hero her desire.

Answered she, Ne'er heal'd I'll be
Till I have full my soft palms
Of rowan berries from the cold pool,
If only be they're pull'd by Fraoch.

Lay the monster of the cold pool
Deep sleeping by the cluster of rowan berries,
Yet safe pluck't he the fruit for Maeve,
Fraoch, son of Feeach, of the keen-edged blades.

Root and branch still crav'd the Queen,
And forth again upon the quest went Fraoch,
Ah, grief of me! the beast tore his fair white skin,
She tore his fair white breast to wounding!

Came Maeve's daughter, of the white palms,
Fresh maid of the golden yellow hair.

The sigh of a friend by the burial cairn,
By Cruachan keening low of women !

The tale of the love of the daughter of Maeve,
For Fraoch, son of Feeach, of the keen-edged
blades.

OSCAR

There was a woman in Alba washing a new tunic for Oscar of the Fayne and, wonder upon me ! did not the water turn into blood, so that a raven flew across and drank of it.

. . . . .

In Erin the battle was going on, man to man and hero to hero, and it was before Oscar that the men and the heroes were going down.

'It is time for me,' said Cairbre the Red, King of Erin, 'to hurl the spear of the seven points.' 'And it is time for me,' said Oscar, 'to hurl the spear of the nine points.' And they both fell, each pierced by the other's spear.

On the northern strand of Erin, at that very moment, was heard a great tumult, the shouting of men, and the clanging of arms. 'It is the ships of my grandfather, Fionn,' said the wounded Oscar, 'and there is help on them for us.' On the very heel of the words came Fionn himself, carrying in his hand the balm that

would heal every wound save that only which had poison in it. 'But there is no healing for me,' said the dying Oscar. 'Calf of my heart,' cried Fionn, 'deeper far was thy wound on the battle day of Dun Dealgan, when the very solan geese could swim in thy blood, and it was my hand that made healing for thee.' And he put the balm into the wound, but, after a while, a great whiteness came over the face of Oscar, and Fionn turned his eyes away. 'There was poison,' he gasped, 'in the spear of Cairbre the Red, King of Erin.' And he who had wept but once before, when Bran, best of hounds, was killed, now wept for Oscar, child of his own child, Ossian.

FIONN'S KEENING FOR OSCAR

Keening hounds are by my side;
Heroes hide their tears no more;
Now they praise him, now they weep—
Wound of me! my heart is sore.

On our shields we bore him far,
Far from field of deeds and doom,
O'er these hills and o'er these deeps,
Till we laid him by his tomb.

Like as woman keens her child,
Keen we Oscar where he lies;
Blood and bone of child of mine,
Nevermore wilt thou arise!

THE COURTING OF THE KING OF ERIN'S DAUGHTER

I went a-courting the daughter of the King of Erin. She asked for the things that might not be: a castle on each of the sunny knolls; a mill on every stream in Erin; a cat with sixty tails. She made her vow, and I made mine. I would not return to her, nor let love gray me, from now to the thrawn-day.

I went hill-wandering. Came a brown maiden of the sheiling: 'I am a milkmaid from the fields of the cattle, from the rockland of the folds. I have given love to thee that mother never gave to the child she was crooning, nor cow of the sheiling to her calf. Though the King's son should come to woo me, I would not be taking him. I am a milkmaid; thou art a herdman.'

For a year and a quarter I lay in a fever. Yon forward milkmaid would not be coming to ask for me. On the last day of the fifth quarter, she reached the window. 'Man who art in there, how art thou?' 'I am but sad and sore: the hair of my head is in ringlets on the floor.' 'Sorrow upon me if it would not please me better to see thee well.' And she sped away to the sheiling.

Early on the morrow I went down to the white strand to play at the shinty. I beat the young King of Lochlann by a hail; I beat the

young King of Spain by another. And the brown maiden came to my side ; she asked if I might be feeling well. 'Is it asking me if I am well thou art ? Altogether well to my friends. Not quite so well to the others.' Bowed her head she, made she laughter. 'Listen, thou woman without sense, without shame. Were it not that my mother was a woman, I would tell a tale of the women. They are like a fox at hide-and-seek, or like the elusive eel in the wet sand.' Raised her head she, made she laughter. And who was it but herself, the King of Erin's daughter, mouth of frolic and of music-laughter. *Chailin og, a stiuir thu mi ?*

THE LAY OF DIARMAD

(Literally translated from the Gaelic, as told in the Island of Eigg)

[Generally and popularly speaking, what *King Arthur* is to the Cymric Celts, so is *Fionn*, the Fair One, to the Celts of Ireland and Scotland. Of the points of resemblance between the different romances circling round these two heroes, perhaps the most interesting is the love-story of *Diarmad* and *Grainne* in the *Fionn Saga*, corresponding to that of *Guinevere* and *Lancelot* in Arthurian Romance. Here is the story of *Diarmad*, as told not so long ago by old folk in the Island of Eigg.]

There was a Beauty-spot on the brow of Diarmad, the son of Fionn's sister, and woman-soever who saw it took the love of her heart for him, so that nothing could gladden her but to be within sight of his eye. The rest of the *Fayne* were not at all pleased at this ; no worth was hunting or fishing or fighting if Diarmad was not there, but if there he was, there would be the women also, and think ye that fin of salmon or antler of stag or head of foe would come into camp, with all the women of the countryside about ! At last, and at long last, the word went out that Diarmad must needs put a covering on his Beauty-spot, and if this he did, no more were women seen in the fighting camp of the *Fayne.*

On a day of days, Diarmad was walking to and fro in front of Fionn's house, and unwittingly he tramped on the tail of a little pup that was frisking and frolicking about his feet. Stooped the hero down to caress the pretty little awkward creature, and if he did, off his brow slipped the covering. And och ! och ! sure, mischance was in Fate that day, for who was standing in the door but Grainne, wife of Fionn, loveliest of women, the choice-one of Alba and Erin and every country on which a tale is put. No sooner got she a glimpse of the Beauty-spot than she took for Diarmad the full-love of her heart, and deeper was that love than the deepness of the sea, and stronger than the sun of the thaw. 'I will go with thee, Diarmad,' said she, 'to the far-off edge of the world.' 'Thou shalt not go with me,' said Diarmad, 'great would be the disgrace to me if I did wrong to my mother's brother.' 'I will go with thee, Diarmad,' said she, 'so long as there is a drop of water in the sea or a beam of light in the sun, and when one or other of them fail, I will die with thee then.' But no eye had Diarmad for her, and his ear and his thought were towards the whining of far-away hounds and they omening evil. And Grainne went then and put on Diarmad the Three Spells of Love, one in his eye to make him see what she wished him to see, one in his mouth to make him say what she wished him to say, and one in his heart to make him think what she wished

him to think ; and when Diarmad looked at her again, bethought he that here was a woman fairer than the rising of the sun after the night of the heavy dew, and took he for her now the heat-love of his heart, and stronger was that love than the fear of disgrace. 'We will go, Diarmad,' said Grainne. 'We will go, Grainne,' said Diarmad. And they took the track of the stag and the hind across the hill, and as they went they were leaving behind them the light of the day and entering the dusk of the night. At last they heard the whoop of the night-hag, and they understood that this was the Forest of Gloom—at any rate, if that was not its name, no other name had ever been put on it. 'We will stay here, Diarmad,' said Grainne. 'We will stay,' said Diarmad, 'but what if the *Fayne* come after us.' 'They will not come,' said Grainne, 'if the Venom-boar be here, and it is here he is.'

But not so went the matter. Ere the little birds of song could sip the cool morning water, heard was the baying of hounds, and behind them were Fionn and his men. Diarmad came out of the wood to meet them. 'Diarmad,' said Fionn, 'it is not the hunting of the stag that put us so early from home to-day.' 'If it is not that,' said Diarmad, 'it is a worse errand.' 'That same,' said Fionn, 'we are on the track of the Venom-boar, and he is spoiling our hunting since a day and a year—I like not, O son of my sister, the mischance that takes off

me stag or hind.' 'And not far off is that same mischance,' said the other. 'Thou wilt come with us, Diarmad,' said Fionn, 'it was not thy wont to be slack in the hunting-hill, and sweeter in the ear is the baying of the hound than the cooing of the dove in the wood.' 'I will come with you,' said Diarmad, 'though it were the last time.' From the rising to the setting of the sun tracked they the Venom-boar, and if once they were on his scent twice were they off it all day long, and if at last he was killed, the honour of the deed to Diarmad.

'The length of the boar,' said Fionn, 'is seven feet four times.' 'Three times,' said Diarmad, 'and thou wilt be at it.' 'Measure and see,' said Fionn. Diarmad measured— 'Seven feet three times,' said he, 'and not an inch more.' 'That may be so, as thou hast measured,' said Fionn, 'but measure thou the boar against the bristle, and thou wilt see that I am right.' Diarmad measured again, this time against the bristle, and if he did, into his finger went one of the poisonous bristles, and ere long Death was at his throat. 'What is fated must happen,' said Fionn.

'O brother of my mother,' said Diarmad, 'where be thy healing cup?' 'I left it at home,' said Fionn, 'but O son of my sister, I will not let death on thee; I will go to the well of the birds, and lift in my two palms the water that will make healing to thee.' And Fionn ran to the well and in his two palms lifted the

pure clear water that the birds delight to drink, but Diarmad was out of his sight now, and anger began to blind him. 'He took off me the Beauty of my wife,' said he, 'I will not make healing to him.' And as his anger rose, his fingers began to sneak from each other, and when he came back to Diarmad, water nor water had he for the healing. 'O brother of my mother,' said Diarmad, and he in great pain, 'where be thy healing?' Stronger now was pity than anger in the heart of Fionn, and he ran back to the well of the birds, and lifted in his two palms the pure clear water that would make the healing of life. But Diarmad was again out of his sight, and anger began to smother pity. 'He took off me the Wisdom of my wife, I will not make healing to him.' And as the anger rose in his breast, the water in his palms subsided, until at last not a drop was to be seen. Diarmad had now the rattle in his throat, and the heart of Fionn filled again with pity, and he ran back to the well of the birds, and lifted in his two palms the pure clear water of healing. But he could not see Diarmad now, and he could only think of the disgrace brought on himself and the *Fayne*. 'He took off me the Love of my wife, I will not make healing to him, I will let death on him.' And what of the water oozed not through his fingers was sucked up by the heat of his anger, and when he came back his palms were as dry as a rock under the mid-day sun. Diarmad was now in the last of the

Three Agonies, and Fionn shed over him the tears of love and pity. 'My dear sister's only son,' said he, 'I will not let death on him, I will make healing to him.' And he gave one great standing-jump to the well of the birds, and another great standing-jump back, with the pure clear water of healing in his palms; but if quick he was, quicker still was the coming of Death, and Diarmad was now in his sleep.

And that night *Grainne*, Love-of-women, kept the death-watch over Diarmad, and she made the Lay to him which the sorrow-women of the wake still sing. And next morning, when they were putting him into the grave, along with his hawk and hound, sudden-leapt Grainne in beside him—and she and Diarmad were left in the Death-sleep side by side.

I see thy hawk and I see thy hound,
Keen in thy love, the hunt-trail they found.

. . . . .

Shed we no tear o'er our brave, but sing
That we to-night death-watch a king.

OSSIAN AFTER THE FEINNE

Ossian was all alone after the Feinne. He was blind, with old age on his back. The one desire of his heart was to see the sun rise once again in the morning on the face of the mountains in the east, and travel through the sky until it should lie again in the evening at the back of the waves in the west. Ere the red cock crew in the morning, Ossian would go to a green hillock at the back of the wind and in the face of the sun, and there he would stay for two-thirds of the day, in order to get the sight he longed for. In the darkening of the evening he would return home, tired, faint, low-spirited, and his countenance white as the sun which he saw not. A day of days, which was the Sunday of Easter, Patrick was in the lower end of the house at the prayers, and Ossian in the upper end at the tales, and both were in full career. In the very midst of the talk, suddenly Ossian sprang to the door.

The lark is lilting,

said he, and took a step forward—

And the day greying,

and he took the other step forward—

And the sun rising,

and he took the third step, and he was standing on the green hillock. He sat there from early to dark, his eye and his mind on the sun, till it went down into the western sea at the mouth of the night. Patrick came where he was. ' What sawest thou ? ' said he to Ossian.

The sea ebbing and flowing
And the sun a-seeking to its ocean,
The sea ebbing and flowing
And Ossian a-seeking to his rest.

' A good sight it is,' said Patrick—

To-day is the Sunday of Easter,
To-day was Christ freed from the death.
And He gave light to the blind
And guidance to the lost——
And Ossian may now go to rest,
Oh, Ossian may now go to rest !

That night Ossian slept.

OF THE CLANS

THE SPELL OF THE SINGER

There was a woman in the Isle of Sōa for whose singing the people had great love. It is said that she would be seeing things ; the men and women who had made the songs, and the men and women who had suffered what the songs tell. One day there was great feasting in Dunvegan Castle, and the harpers and the pipers and the bards were all into the music. ' Is it not the beautiful thing to be in Dunvegan Castle ? ' said the listening one. Then it was put to the woman who would be seeing things if she, too, would sing a song. And she sang. ' I must arise now,' said the listening one, with a start, ' sure, there is the long way before me to Dunvegan Castle.'

ONE WHO SANG ' THE CRADLE SPELL OF DUNVEGAN '

' What is yon music which I am hearing, if it is hearing it I am ? ' said the Lady of Macleod to herself, as she sat in her hall, spinning the wool. And she arose and made for the music,

and whither drew it her but, step by step, to the sleep-chamber of her baby son. What saw she there but the Little Woman of the Green Kirtle swathing the child in a silk banner of many colours, and singing over him a cradle spell.

Ho-ro veel-a-vok, Bone and flesh o' me,
Ho-ro veel-a-vok, Blood and pith o' me.
Skin like falling snow, green thy mail-coat,
Live thy steeds be, dauntless thy following.

'God sain us!' cried out the Lady of Macleod, 'it is I who am the mother to yon child.' And at the sound of the Good Name she vanished, the Little Woman of the Green Kirtle.

But the Cradle Spell remained; the Banner, likewise; and, together, they made of a clan the something more than a clan. The women nursed the children and crooned the songs and did the day's work, with a thought somewhere in the heart of each that on a day of days she might be called to Dunvegan Castle to sing the Cradle Spell over the young heir. And the men, going forth to battle, fought in the hope that now was the day on which the Banner would appear at their head, putting rout on the enemy. Outwardly, at any rate, the luck was mostly with the women. Baby heirs came often; the Banner came but twice. The end of the tale is not yet, however. 'What came twice will

come thrice,' say the Islesfolk, 'and on a day to be, it is the Fairy Flag, going forth for the last time, that will be overcoming the world for us, Gaels.' Which may well be, if one remembers that its first burden was a little child, its first victory a song, and its weaving not of the flesh.

There is a bidding to which the Gael is never false, the bidding which puts him under the spells. And an Islesman is under spells both to his heart and to his head to give love to Mary Macleod, the most fascinating figure in Gaelic poetry from the beginning of the seventeenth century to a century on which fate has not yet put a name. A woman not of the schools but of herself, and fond of taking her own way when her own way seemed the best, she broke, for love of her gift, with such of the old metrical conventions as had hitherto hobbled the bard. Judged by the few poems which are known for certain to be hers, she holds, if not the first place among Gaelic poets, a place at any rate among the first, for sheer artistry and for beauty of rhythm. And if all the songs that are said to be hers are really hers, or even a tithe of them, her place, as a Gael would put it, is at the very head of the table. One may think of her, then, whether in her poetry or in her life, as by no means least in the procession of great Celtic women which began with Deirdre and St Bride and has, perhaps, not ended with Flora Macdonald.

An Isleswoman from Rōdel of Harris, Mary Macleod, or Mairi, Daughter of Alastair Rua, as she is better known to the Gaels, was, for the genius of her, chosen out of many gifted ones to sing the Cradle Spell to the baby heir of Dunvegan. But no handed-down lullaby, howsoever strong, could express all that the nurse felt towards the little one, and it was song on the song with her, praise on the praise, and rapture on the rapture, be the hours canonical or not. Ruari, the Chief of Dunvegan, shaking his head, flung at her the herdman's saying :

Bheir an t-anabarr molaidh an t-anabarr dosgaidh.
The overmuch praise bringeth the overmuch loss.

And, sure enough, the loss came—once, twice, thrice. After which, by every rule and by every thought of the Isles, it had to be exile for Mary Macleod ; the place of her strangerhood, as the Gaelic has it, being the little Island of Sgarba, in the Southern Hebrides. And there the wonder of the Gael came upon her. ' Is it not on me the wonder is,' cried St Columba, ' to be here in Alba, and to be looking on Moola from Iona.' ' Great is the wonder on me,' said Flora Macdonald, ' to be looking on the boiling of the Connel from Dunstaffnage, instead of looking on the Outer Sea from the machair of Uist.' And Mary Macleod :

On the knoll I am sitting,
Sore-thinking in silence,
The wonder upon me
Why gaze I on Islay ;
Little thought I aforetime,
Till yore took its cantrip,
Fate ever should lure me
To gaze on Jura from Sgarba.

In those days, there being no fast mail-boats to cause delay, a whisper travelled from isle to isle, if not in the mouth of the wind, at any rate on its heel ; and in due time Mary Macleod's plaint reached Dunvegan in Skye and Rōdel in Harris, and the many places where *Siol Tormaid*, the Seed of Norman, grew. And on a day of days the galley of Macleod cast anchor off Sgarba, having aboard the glad news that Mairi, Daughter of Alastair Rua, was to return home to Dunvegan ; only, she was to make no more songs. Make no more songs ? As if she wanted to make any more ! Sure, her music-of-laughter would henceforth be the croon of the soft Dunvegan voices—and there and then Mary forgot that she was no longer a bard. ' Is it a song I am hearing ? ' asked the steersman. ' It is only a tune, O man of my heart ' ; but to that same tune went words fresh as the breeze that was even then speeding the galley homeward to Dunvegan. ' Is it a song I am hearing ? ' asked the Chief himself another time, after the young heir, unlike his three

elder brothers, had recovered from a serious illness. 'By your leave it is only a croon,' said Mary Macleod, 'and it comes fresh and warm from a glad heart.' She was never again forbidden to make a song. Perhaps *E-fein*, Himself, as the Chief was known among the clansfolk, remembered a story which even the Church had never banned. In the days of long before, as a woman of the Isles lay dying, a young mavis went into lilting on a rowan-tree in front of the door. 'Chase him away,' whispered one of the keening-women. 'Let him alone,' said the dying one, 'it is my share to find death, it is his share to sing the song, and with the Good Being only is the knowledge of the furthermore.'

The tradition of the Isles, as handed down in the ceilidh, gives a picture of Mairi, Daughter of Alastair Rua, which must surely be her very self.

By the look of her, it is not the creel of peats you would be wishing to put on her back, though, indeed, there was the good marrow, too, in her, whether for the hill or for the sea. It is two tartan plaids she would be having on; a little one round her head, with the white frill of the mutch showing through; and a large one, a *tonnag*, draped round her shoulders, and fastened in front by a *braisde*, a silver circlet. It is of silk her gown would often be, as befitted one who might go in by the front door of Dunvegan Castle. In her right hand she would

have a staff, with a silver head on it, and in her left a silver mull ; and people would be saying that never a foot of her would go on a journey without having in her wallet a silver quaich, out of which folk of name thought it an honour and an obligation to drink. And the eyes of her were so living ! And when they would be in the laughter as well, themselves and her share of wrinkles together, you would never wish but to be looking at them.

One can imagine, then, the thrill in the ceilidh when, on a memorable night, up would go the door latch, and there would appear, not the usual late neighbour, but the very woman whom the Islesfolk would be wishing to look at. There would be the curtsy for her, did she allow it ; but already, no doubt, her upraised hand would have put the artist's silence on such as, panting to give her the glad welcome, would thereby interrupt the teller of the tale or the singer of the song. And then it would be, ' Man of my heart, do not give the last word to Patrick the cleric. Never was Ossian, the bard, without the ready answer and the sore word. Teller of the tale, we are listening.' Or, ' Woman over yonder, is it finishing the song thou art ? If only thou wert beginning ! ' But the folks of the ceilidh would know their luck. Patrick and Ossian, what remained of them, lived in the township ; Mary Macleod might be in the other township by sunset, to-morrow. So—' Sit ye down, gentles and

semples ; sit ye down, each as he may ; and sit ye down, arrow-maker ! ' And sometime after midnight, the youth who was feeding the fire regardless of the hole in the peat-stack, would, if he saw older eyes upon him, declare as though on oath, ' By the soul of me, myself would never be wishing to smoor the fire when Mairi, Daughter of Alastair Rua, is at the ceilidh ; but, indeed, myself would be wishing to smoor the sun.' Such a night, however, would have put feyness even on a slug, let alone a youth of the Isles.

Mary Macleod, if one may judge by the events she sang and the people she knew, must have gone through nearly fourscore years and ten of ceilidh and song ; her full age, according to tradition, being fivescore years and five. In days when people grew old long before their time, she became a pilgrim of song when far beyond middle age, going on foot from clachan to clachan, and by boat from isle to isle, throughout the years. And not even Ruari, the Chief, was wont to meet with a prouder welcome among the Islesfolk than was the little old woman with the lit eyes and the tangle of crowsfeet. Into the various festivities of the various clachans there came in those days a new fascination, the certainty that Mairi, Daughter of Alastair Rua, would be somewhere, and the hope that it would be here rather than there. And if the waulking was here, and the wedding or the harvest-home there, it is here

she would be, sure enough, and not there. Only once, it is said, did she hear the laughter of a waulking and pass by. But the fulling women understood ; likewise, all who smiled at the quaintness of her blessing upon the little child that was being christened in Rōdel of Harris.

> The three blessings of the priest,
> The seven blessings of the people ;
> One may not put to the three,
> And if it be not rude to put to the seven,
> My own seven to the seven of the people.

But if Mary Macleod, at the christening, put her own seven blessings to the seven blessings of the people, it was herself she put, blood and bone and heart of her, to the folk life of the Isles, through the waulking of many a clachan. But few realise, perhaps, how much artistry there went to the fulling music of even one web of cloth. Each stage of the work needed its own special kind of song ; old words had to be adapted to new tunes, and old tunes to new words ; ancient fragments, almost forgotten, had to be eked out by additional verses, while songs not made for labour, such as the heroic ballads, had to be taken to pieces and inserted into a chorus ; all of which called for literary and musical skill of a kind which suggests, not so much the folk, as a genius now and again among the folk. In the seventeenth century

that genius was Mary Macleod. While the web was still in the loom, a woman, wandering by sea and by land, was busy weaving the songs which in due time would go to the fulling of that same web. The loom, says the Gael, weaves nothing that lasts, save the song which it weaveth not.

Mairi, Daughter of Alastair Rua, sleeps, face downward, by the Church of St Clement, in Rōdel of Harris, the Iona of her clan. 'Not on the clouds would my eyes be, O kinsfolk,' said she in the parting, 'but on Rōdel of Harris.' Her thought was, perhaps, the thought of St Bride, the Foster-mother, even as her blood was the blood: Beautiful the cloud on high, my children, but more beautiful still the shower which falleth, giving growth to the corn and milk to the cattle, for little children.

CRADLE SPELL OF DUNVEGAN

Sleep, my little child,
  Hero tenderling,
Dream, my little child,
  Hero, fawn-like one,
High on mountain brows,
  Be thy stag-tryst,
Speed thy yew arrows straight antlerwards.

Sleep, my little child,
Hero, gentle-bred,

Dream, my little child,
Hero, battle-bred,
Skin like falling snow,
Green thy mail coat,
Live thy steeds, dauntless thy following.

Sleep, my little child,
Bone and flesh o' me,
Dream, my little child,
Blood and pith o' me,
Dream thy hero dream,
Thro' thy child-sleep,
Hang thy shield, Lochlann-like, heavenwards.

Ho-ro veel-a-vók, Ho ro aily,
Ho ro veel-a-vòk, Ho ro aily,
Our clan galley sail
To thy dreamland,
Through thy child-sleep,
Ho-ro-aily.

SEA-FEAST

(After Mary Macleod)

Horrim sooravee hoo haw!
Hearts desire be guidance to her!
Horrim sooravee hoo haw!
Ship o' my child the seas a-sailing,
Horrim sooravee hoo haw!

Spied I her at break o' dawning
Heard I far her clanking, rolling,
Horrim sooravee hoo haw!

Gay the tunes of piper, harper,
Frolicsome they with song and laughter,
Horrim sooravee hoo haw!

Sheen o' candles,
Gleam o' flagons,
Feast for chief o' mighty valiance!
Horrim sooravee hoo haw!

MACLEOD'S GALLEY

(After Mary Macleod)

What yon great ship? Hee ree a vo-o!
Sailing coastwise? Hee ree a vo-o!
Our own galley she:

What yon great ship? Hee ree a vo-o!
Ship o' great kings! Hee ree a vo-o!
Our own galley she!

Prow to seaward,
Out we sail,
Though waiting to-day,
We'll sail to-morrow!
Ho ee a vo,
Hug o eile!

Wells of water, Hee ree a vo-o !
Swelling prow-ward, Hee ree a vo-o !
Wells o' red wine, Hee ree a vo-o !
Flowing sternward, Hee ree a vo-o !
Our own galley she !

To Duntulm
Of towering walls
Where feasting they call
For piping, harping.
Ho ee a vo,
Ho rionn eile !

High on wave tops
Now we sail,
And follow the wake
Of deeds of daring.
Ho ee a vo,
Ho rionn eile !

TO THE SEA KING OF THE ISLES

(After Mary Macleod)

Great Sea-Roving to King Manann,
Ho la vo haw ree hoo-o.
Sailing 'twixt Orkney Isles and Erin,
Hee ho ro-va ho ree hoo-a.

Ne'er curved whelk on bed of ocean,
But thy keel will surely scrape on !
Hee ho ro-va ho ree hoo-o.

THE ROAD TO THE ISLES

Whatso rock or cove thy haven,
There will be singing, shouting of boat-songs.
Hee ho ro-va ho ree hoo-o.

Like as a lamb a-tracking to sheep-fold,
Gentle track to thee and simple,
Like as a lamb a-tracking to sheep-fold.
Hee ho ro-va ho ree hoo-o.

RUARI OF DUNVEGAN

Ruari, Ruari, Ruari, rare one,
Many a head would cast its snood for thee,
Many a coif waits head for love o' thee.

Lure of tree on bird of May-month,
Lure of loch on burn of hillside,
Lure of sea on loch at even,
Lure of Ruari Og on maidens.
Ruari, Ruari, Ruari, rare one.

TO THE CRADLE LORD OF THE ISLES

Child of Isla, falls the gloamin';
Quiet thy sleeping, strong thy waking,
Child of Isla, falls the gloamin'.

Western Albyn thine for croftland—
All her Bens and all her cattle,

All her rowans, all her hazel,
All her bird-land, all her stag-land,
Child of Isla, shall be thine.

Thine is Jura, thine green Isla,
Far-flung Isles, from Lews to Arran.
Morvern glens and Moidart waters,
All the seas from Moyle to Mannin,
Child of Isla, shall be thine.

Crown-descended, thou'rt the blood of
Coll of the ships and Conn of keen blades,
Ne'er thy growth from cool of waters,
But from heat of woman's breast-milk—
Child of Isla, sleep till dawn.

THE LORD OF THE ISLES

Lord of the Isles, whose lofty name
A thousand bards have given to fame,
The mate of Monarchs, and allied
On equal terms with England's pride.
SIR WALTER SCOTT

This from the Sleat Seanachie and from the two books of Clanranald, the Red and the Black :

From the race of Eremon, through Conn of the Hundred Battles and through Coll the Noble, are the Lords of the Isles : to whom pertained a big house and the half of Alba : whose likeness was Cuchullan and he the sun arising ; and to whom is the headship of the Gael, as it is but right to proclaim.

Donald of the Isles, son of the Good John, son of Angus Og, son of Angus Mor, son of Donald, son of Ranald, son of Somerled, the noble and renowned high chief of the Hebrides. He it was who received the sceptre from his brother, Ranald, at the Cill of St Donnan, in the Isle of Eigg. And this is the manner in which a Lord of the Isles was crowned : There was a square stone, seven feet long, and the tract of a man's foot cut thereon, upon which he stood, denoting that he should walk in the footsteps and uprightness of his fathers, and that he was installed by right in his possessions. He was clothed in a white habit, to show his innocence and integrity of heart, and that he would be a light to his people, and maintain the true religion. Then he was to receive a white rod in his hand, intimating that he had power to rule, not with tyranny and partiality, but with discretion and sincerity. Then he received his forefathers' sword, signifying that his duty was to protect and defend his people from the incursions of their enemies, in peace or in war, as the obligations and customs of his fathers were. The ceremony being over, mass was said after the blessing of the bishop and seven priests, the people pouring their prayer for the success and prosperity of the new created Lord. When they were dismissed, the Lord of the Isles feasted them for a week thereafter ; and gave liberally to the monks, poets, bards and musicians.

Of Donald of the Isles, aforesaid, there are many

exploits and deeds written in other places. He fought the Battle of Harlaw against Duke Murdoch of Scotland in defence of his own right; and he gave lands in Moola and in Islay to the Monastery of Iona; and, likewise, made a covering of gold and silver for the relic of the hand of Colum-cille. He afterwards died in Islay. And this is the manner in which a Lord of the Isles would die: Monks and priests being over him, and he having received the Body of Christ, and the Holy Oil having been put upon him, his fair body was brought to Iona of Colum-cille. And the abbot and the monks and the vicars came forth to meet him, as it was the custom to meet the body of the King of the Isles; and his service and waking were honourably performed during eight days and eight nights; after which, his full noble body was laid in the same grave with his fathers, in the Reilig of Oran.

Like the rising sun
Putting darkness on the stars,
Nālla vō hēē!
My king's son in his armour,
With his spotted speckled shield,
Nālla vō hā!

White his spear-heads gleaming,
Nalla vo hee!
Swift his arrows in their flight,
Nalla vo ha!

See his great galleys sailing,
Nalla vo hee,
Hero he like to Cuchullin,
Like the rising sun,
Nalla vo ha !

FLORA MACDONALD

No one will be surprised to find Flora Macdonald among the singers of the Isles. Her whole life was a song which lives and will live in the heart and on the lips of the folk. In making a love-lilt to her sweetheart (Allan Macdonald of Kingsburgh), she was but following the beautiful custom of her country. Now and again, when some of the old Western homes are broken up, one sees in a box of odds and ends a framed piece of sampler work, with various family names embroidered upon it. In Flora Macdonald's days, and for many years after, the Hebridean maiden spent her evenings making her one song and stitching her sampler, for these, rather than trinkets of gold and silver, were to be her offering to her lover. The sampler became in due time the family record, telling of life and death, joy and sorrow ; but the song wandered furth of the home, and was sung by the folk as a bit of sampler-work done by a girl in love.

Flora Macdonald stands high in history, but she stands still higher in the lore of the

Hebrides. The folk have not, indeed, composed many songs in her praise, but they have done better—they have taken the finest ballads of an older world and made her their heroine. It would be difficult, for instance, to mention a more passionate poem than 'Seathan, Son of the King of Erin,' the lament of a maid of ancient times for her slain lover, and there are those in the Isles who find in it the life of Flora Macdonald, and her loyalty to her king. The folk seldom err in their reading of character, and in the case of Prince Charlie and Flora Macdonald they have probably judged aright the man and the woman. The man has impressed them, not so much by his strength as by his misfortunes and the charm of his person and cause. The woman, on the other hand, has always been regarded as the latter-day embodiment of an older and stronger heroism. The former feeling created, of necessity, a new literature, tender, glowing, spirited; the latter found itself already voiced in the ballads of the ancient past.

Numerous anecdotes of Flora Macdonald and the Prince, some of them pathetic, some playful, are still floating through the Isles, and may be picked up easily by the sympathetic hand. In Kilmuir, Skye, some of the women were greatly distressed that a gentlewoman like Flora Macdonald should be so extremely deferential to 'a long-legged hussy of a servant, and she not of our own country at all.' 'Tell them,' said

Flora, 'that Betty Burke is Irish and, sure, might she not put the knife into me, if I were not civil to her!' The explanation quite satisfied Protestant Skye, which then, as now, had grave doubts about Catholic Ireland. It was on a somewhat similar occasion that Flora Macdonald remarked, partly in jest and very much in earnest: 'Here is one would give her share of the world, and herself into the bargain, to get that same Irish girl out of the country.'

It is worth recording that in Skye, Betty Burke had the reputation of being a beautiful Gaelic speaker. 'But it is not the same as our Gaelic,' said the folk; 'we can understand every word she says, but we cannot understand what the words mean.' Evidently Prince Charlie's dialect was a judicious mixture of Gaelic and French, which probably made better sound than sense. When, in the course of time, it leaked out who Betty Burke was, the folk had difficulty in finding even Gaelic words strong enough to express their feelings. 'But it is not a wonderful thing at all,' said an old man at the ceilidh; 'does not the lark say in her song, Often, often, often, goes the Christ in the stranger's guise.' Loyalty could hardly go further.

According to all accounts, the few, and they were not really few, who had been in the secret, went all their days the more softly and the more stately because of what had been, and, in

the telling, ever added to the glamour of the tale. 'Lady of Kingsburgh,' said a cleric who was equally devoted to the Hanoverian dynasty and to Pauline theology, 'thou art surely talking of the Apostle Paul and not of a sinful man of our own generation.' 'Thou man without sense,' was the quick retort, 'Paul is not the name of my king.'

As the tradition grew and mellowed the halo round Flora Macdonald's head glowed with a deeper, softer light, like the autumn moon shining through mist. 'Flora, Flora,' said Malcolm Macleod of Raasay, who had himself assisted in the Prince's escape, 'no wonder tho' thine eye be pure and thy hand white—the eye has seen and the hand has led my king.' And the old folk whisper that Flora Macdonald's own last words were: *Criosd is Ailean is Tearlach Og.*

FLORA MACDONALD'S LOVE SONG

Allan, would that thou wert near me!
Allan donn, my dear, my treasure,
Heavy load of love I carry.
Allan, would that thou wert near me!

Harp nor fiddle e'er can lift it,
Nor shrill pipes with lilting chanter.
Allan, would that thou wert near me!

Sad, each day for thee I'm longing,
Gone with thee all joy and gladness.
Allan, would that thou wert near me!

In deep groves and leafy woodlands,
Fain would I with thee be wandering.
Allan, would that thou wert near me!

Allan of the curling ringlets,
Sweet to me thy honey-kisses.
Allan, would that thou wert near me!

THE LADY OF CLANRANALD

But yestereve the daughter of Clanranald had been laid into her death-sleep in the island of St Finnan.

But to-day the men of Moydart had come back from the wars, and the aged chief, with sorrow eating at his own heart, smiled a welcome on the men who had come home. And that night there was a feast of feasts in Castle Tirrum of Moydart, and handing round of horns and health-drinks.

Out from the lights and the joy-shouts went the Lady of Clanranald, not knowing whither, but groping blindly, led by a mother's soul-agony, the loss of her child.

But far across the Bens lay the waters of Loch Shiel and the Isle of St Finnan, and long ere she could reach them, the Lady of Clan-

ranald sank into the heather, and from her lips broke the cry, 'My Caristīona, wilt answer my cry?'

But only the night-hags answered and the far-away keening of the Western Sea.

CARISTĪONA

My Caristīona! wilt answer my cry?
Naught answer'st to-night,
My grief, Ah me!
My Caristīona, wilt answer my cry?

Deep my heart is grieving, grieving,
And my eyes are streaming, streaming,
I yestreen stood by thy kisting
By thy grave to-night I'm list'ning.

My Caristīona, wilt answer my cry?
Still answer'st thou not,
My grief, Ah me!
My Caristīona!

HEART OF FIRE LOVE

(TO CLANRANALD)

Heart of Fire-love, Son of Allan,
Heart of Fire-love to the Isle-folk !
Ro-van-o. Hee-ree ree-ree-o.

Croon of croons, reborn at dawn-light,
Thou'rt my dreaming, Thou my waking :
Ro-van-o. Hee-ree ree-ree-o.

Of the swan-flock, guiding swan thou,
Sailing by the Isles to Cala.
Ro-van-o ! Hee-ree ree-ree-o !
Óvan, Hee ree-ree-ree-aily,
Ro-van o ! Hee-ree ree-ree-o !

SEALWOMEN AND OTHER UNCANNY FOLK

N

THE SEALWOMAN'S CROON

(AN CADAL TROM)

The seals are the children of the King of Lochlann under spells—*clann Righ Lochlainn fo gheasaibh*. Beauty, wisdom, and bravery were in their blood as well as in their skins, and that was why their step-mother took the hate of destruction for them, and live she would not, unless she got them out of the way. Seven long years did she spend with a namely magician, a-learning of the Black Art, until at last she was as good as her master at it, with a woman's wit forbye. And what think ye of it!—did not the terrible carlin put her step-children under eternal spells, that they should be half-fish, half-beast, so long as waves would beat on the shores of Lochlann! Och! Och! that was the black deed—sure you would know by the very eyes of the seals that there is kingly blood in them. But the worst is still untold. Three times in the year, when the full moon is brightest, the seals must go back to their own natural state, whether they wish it or no. Their step-mother put this in the spells so that there might be a world of envy and sorrow in the hearts every time they saw others ruling in the kingdom

which is theirs by right of blood. And if you were to see one of them as they should be always, if right were kept, you would take the love of your heart for that one, and if weddings were in your thoughts, sure enough a wedding there would be. Long ago, and not so long ago either, a man in Canna was shore-wandering on an autumn night and the moon full, and did he not see one of the seal lady-lords washing herself in a streamlet that was meeting the waves! And just as I said, he took the love of his heart for her, and he went and put deep sleep on her with a sort of charm that he had, and he carried her home in his arms. But och! och! when the wakening came, what had he before him but a seal! And though he needed all the goodness he had, love put softening in his heart, and he carried her down to the sea and let her swim away to her own kith and kin, where she ought to be. And she spent that night, it is said, on a reef near the shore, singing like a daft mavis, and this is one of her croons—indeed, all the seals are good at the songs, and though they are really of the race of Lochlann, it is the Gaelic they like best.

Pillowed on the sea-wrack brown am I,
On the gleaming white sheen-sand, O hee!
Lulled by sweet croon of waves, I lie—
Nor slumber deep part thee and me?

Far away my own seal-mate lone
On the foaming green grey reefs, O hee !
Lies, and 'tis the cause of all my moan
That slumber deep took thee from me.

On the morrow shall I o'er the sound,
O'er the gleaming white sheen-sand, O hee,
Swim until I reach my *grayhan down*
Nor slumber deep part thee and me.

THE SEALWOMAN'S SEA-JOY

The Islesman in whom goodness is stronger than love, finding the sealwoman bathing in the creek, will let her go back to her own natural element : the Islesman in whom love is stronger than goodness cunningly hides her skin, and weds her on the third night after he has found her.

The sealwoman was hot and tired baking the bread and making the churn against her husband's return from the hunting-hill. 'Ochōn, the burning of me,' thought she, 'what would I not give for a dive and a dip into the beauteous coolness of the cool sea-water !' On the very heel of her words, who rushed in but her wee laddie, his two eyes aglow. 'O mother, mother,' cried he, 'is not this the strange thing I have found in the old barley-kist, a thing softer than mist to my touch !' And if

she looked, and look she did, this strange thing, softer than mist, was it not her own skin! Quickly, deftly, the sealwoman, tired and hot, put it on, and taking the straight track to the shore, it was nought for her then but a dip down and a keek up, all evening long, in the beauteous coolness of the cool sea-water. 'Wee laddie of my heart,' said she, ere night came upon her, 'when thou and thy father will be in want, thou wilt set thy net off this rock, and thy mother will throw into it the choice fish that will make a laddie grow, and a man pleased with himself.'

And the sealwoman, with a dip down and a keek up, went on lilting her sea-joy in the cool sea-water.

THE MERMAID'S CROON

Sleep beneath the foam o' the waves
On reefs of sleep,
Dreaming in dew-mist ;

Thy sea-bed, the seals o'erhead
From reivers dread
Securely guarding.

While I croon, white swan of the moon,
Wild duck of the sound,
By thee are resting.

Moon-white swan, white swan of the moon,
Wild duck of the sound,
Anear thee resting.

The *Swan* is the daughter of the twelve moons (Nighean an da luan deug), the *Seals* are the children of the King of Lochlann under spells (Clann Righ Lochlann fo geasa), and the Mallard is under the Virgin's protection : hence all three are sacred and not even the reivers would meddle with the tenderling left under such protection.

THE SACRED WILD SWAN

Long ago, before the days of the Red Flood, the Moon shone with such brightness that you could have seen the bristle in a man's foot, if bristle were there. Did not this put great anger on the Sun, as he lay on his back in the Outer Sea ? I will arise, he said, and put shame on yon shameless Moon. And he arose.

Ever since, the moon is paler than she ought to be, if ought were ; save when the corn, ripening, puts the glow on her face. And her daughter, the Wild Swan, stately and silent under the sun, is Sweet-voiced, even if sad, under the Moon. And no good Islesman would put taunt or hurt on that same Wild Swan, although evil men once did both, leaving a woman-lord to keen over her mate :—

THE ROAD TO THE ISLES

Swan of the West,
  Mate of my heart,
Westward I'd fly toward Jura,

On night of stars,
  Strangewards I'd fly,
Westward fly toward Jura.

THE TROUTLING OF THE SACRED WELL

In the Holy Wells of the Isles there lived, through generations, a trout which, in the thoughts of the folk, was accounted pious as a monk and worldly-wise as a Druid. To such a trout went the maid of the song for tidings of her absent lover.

Troutling, grey-blue silv'ry seer
  O' yon well,
Tell me where is now my love
Where, ah where roves the youth,
Stays he hunting far in stagland
Or sails he homeward ?

Troutling, little grey-blue seer
  O' yon well,
Tell me where is now my love
Roves he east, roves he west,
Sails he homeward, or at back of sun
Lies he sleeping ?

Troutling, silv'ry grey-blue seer
O' yon well,
Tell to me, goes Mary's Son with my love,
And may I now and ever leave my plaint
In yon well that ebbs not ?

THE WATER KELPIE

The *each-uisge*, the water-horse, popularly but perhaps erroneously known as the Kelpie, is the most terrible and the most feared of all the supernatural beings which the Gael has to contend with. To men he appears as a huge black hairy monster whose snort and gnash haunt them ever after like a nightmare ; to women, especially the young and fair, he appears as a handsome youth with golden hair and laughing eyes. In the early years of the nineteenth century he met one of the Eigg maidens and made love to her under the shadow of the Scūir, but the warm sunshine being stronger than his wooing he fell asleep (and did not that itself show that he wasn't natural !) with his head in the girl's lap and his hand in her fine black locks. And as the maiden gently stroked his golden hair, did she not find it full of sand ! And when she looked at his feet, were they not both hoofed ! Being of the old Clanranald blood, however, she neither fainted nor screamed, but taking up a sharp stone, quietly cut her hair free and escaped home. The Kelpie has been

generally more successful with the simpler maidens of Skye and Uist, who have at various times been cajoled into his under-loch dwelling and kept there for at least a year and a day. In the end, however, he is always left sitting on a knoll, under the shadow of a rock, song-lulling his child to sleep and trying to bribe the mother to return to her charge :—

A-vōre, avōre, return to thy sonny,
Shalt get a bonnie withy of trout from me.

All this is in strict accord with Gaelic folk-lore ; the strong is always beaten in the end, and the fiercest supernatural beings are credited with certain human qualities which make them more or less lovable, and attract one's pity and sympathy. In this respect a parallel may be drawn between the *Water-Kelpie* and *The Deil.* Robert Burns has been justly praised by critics for ' his beautiful and relenting spirit towards the traditional Enemy of Mankind ' :

But, fare you weel, auld Nickie-ben,
O wad ye tak' a thought an' men',
Ye aiblins might—I dinna ken—
Still hae a stake—
I'm wae to think upo' yon den,
Ev'n for your sake !

But the bard's Celtic ancestors had already gone one better when they placed a little child on the terrible Kelpie's knee and made him croon a mother's lullaby :—

Mo sheana chab liath ri d' bhial beag baoth,
'S mi seinn phort duit.

My old grey mouth to thy wee tender lips,
And I singing tunes to thee.

Nor is it a far-fetched idea to hold that Burns learned his charity towards the Deil from old Jenny Wilson who, as he tells us himself, 'resided in the family and had the largest collection in the country of tales and songs concerning devils, ghosts, fairies, brownies, witches, warlocks, spunkies, kelpies, elf-candles, dead-lights, wraiths, apparitions, cantrips, giants, enchanted towers, dragons, and other trumpery.' At any rate, the Deil of Robert Burns is not the Satan of theology, but rather the *Muisean* of Gaelic folk-lore—the gentlemanly scamp who is never out of mischief, and is always trying to take a mean advantage of poor mortals. And the analogy holds good to the end of the address. In Gaelic lore, *Muisean* strikes one as being at least as much fool as knave, and is as often as not outwitted by the clerics (a lost art though !) and by the wise men of the township ; likewise with the Deil :—

An' now, Auld Cloots, I ken ye're thinkin'
A certain Bardie's rantin', drinkin',
Some luckless hour will send him linkin'
To your black pit ;
But faith ! he'll turn a corner jinkin',
An' cheat you yet.

All this is delightfully human and delightfully Celtic, and leads one to the 'larger hope' (or rather the largest hope!) that the Deil may mend his ways and 'still ha'e a stake.' But how does the idea compare with the Gaelic picture—a little child being crooned to sleep on the kelpie's knee?

FAIRY MUSIC

(A literal translation of some Gaelic notes taken down from old folk in the Hebrides)

To-day is Friday, the day of the Cross, and we may speak well or ill, just as we like, of the folk of the *bruth*, of the Fairy-den; were it any other day, they would hear the least whisper, and an ill word might put great anger on them. Why do they hate Friday and the Cross? Darling of my heart, it isn't hatred at all, at all—it is only envy. Hast never heard of the man of God who was one day reading the Holy Book on a knoll near Dunvegan Castle? That were indeed a tale to tell, but to make it short, did not the knoll open where there was no opening at all, and out came one of the Folk? 'That is a good book thou art reading,' said she to the man. 'It is the Book of God,' said he. 'And is there any hope for us in the Book,' asked she. As I have said, the man was a man of God, but though his heart was in heaven, his head was

on earth, and if he told the truth, he told it artfully. 'There is hope in the Book,' said he, 'for the whole seed of Adam.' Almost before the words were out of his mouth, the little woman in green gave the shriek of perdition and vanished out of sight, but for long after a voice of wailing was heard in that same knoll: *Not of the seed of Adam we, not of the seed of Adam we.*

The poor Folk! it is likely they have their own share of trouble, just like ourselves; and if the tales be true, they often put trouble on others too. There was a woman in Barra herding cattle one day, and did not the Folk come upon her and carry her with them underground! At any other time the same woman would not have been against a little ploy, but, sad tale! she had left a babe at home, and sweeter than Fairy music is the laughter of her only child to the mother's ear and heart. Och! och! she must have been the sad one, sitting day and night in the *bruth*, eyes and arms seeking the little one that was not there. O darling of my heart, wae's me for the full breast and the empty knee. And the tale says that one evening she knew—but how she knew is what I do not know—that her sister was sitting on the knoll, and she began to croon a song in the hope that she might be heard above—

Little sister, O my sister,
Pitiest thou my plaint to-night?

For all that, few who go into the *bruth* are as keen to leave it as was the woman of Barra. The Folk are so good at the music that if thou wert to enter the *bruth* to-day the sapling might become the tallest tree in the forest ere thou would'st get tired of listening. Hast heard of *Cnoc-na-piobaireachd*, the Knoll-of-piping, in Eigg ? In my young days, and in the young days of the ones before me, all the lads of the island used to go there on the beautiful moonlight nights, and bending down an ear to the knoll, it was tunes they would get, and tunes indeed ; reels that would make the Merry-dancers themselves go faster, and laments that would draw tears from the eyes of a corpse ; sure, in one night, a lad o' music might get as many reels and laments as would marry and bury all the people in Eigg—ay, and in the whole Clanranald country forbye !

But I never heard that any of the young lads in Eigg had the luck of MacCrimmon. It was from the Folk of the *Bruth* that he got his share of music, and not little was that same share. Three of them came to him as he lay weeping on the knoll, and said the first : ' I will give thee the championship of piping.' Said the second : ' I will give thee the championship of goodly company.' Said the third : ' Two championships are enough for any man ; I will put an ill along with them—the madness of the full moon.' And as it is the unlikely thing that often happens, better was the ill than the good,

for the MacCrimmons never played so well as when the moon was full and the madness lay upon them. Hast ever heard of the two night-wanderers who were passing a wood near Dunvegan Castle ? Said the one to the other : ' Are they not the two beautiful things, the full moon in the sky and the music of the mavis in yonder wood ? ' ' It is not the mavis at all,' said the other ; ' it is Padruig Mor MacCrimmon, and the warbling of the mavis in his fingers.'

FAIRY PLAINT

I am sad, O little sister,
Pity me, O little sister.
O hi-o, hu-o-ho.

Low my hut is, low and narrow,
Wantin' wisp o' thatch or heath rope.
O-hi-o, hu-o-ho.

The hill-waters stream-sweep through it,
Cold hill-waters stream-sweep through it,
O hi-o, hu-o-ho.

But not that my cause of sorrow,
'Tis not that my cause of sorrow,
But the loss of my one daughter !
O hi-o-ho-o-ho.

THE RETURN FROM THE FAIRY HILL

She had been in the fairy mound for a day and a year, as she thought herself, but in that time a sapling oak had grown up and decayed again. And now she wandered by the foot of the Corrie, her old landmark, looking for the clachan where her people lived and for the cattle which they had reared. But there was nothing to be seen except a few stones peeping out through a tangle of nettles and rushes and bracken.

Only the old well remained, and as she stooped down with a nameless fear upon her to pluck some of its water-cress, she saw one like unto a man passing by. With a cry she rushed after the only one of her people who seemed to be left. 'Brother, brother, is it leaving me thou art? And again she cried: 'Brother, brother, there are only two of us now left!' And the other wanderer turned, and in His hands and feet were the marks of nails.

Thou'lt not leave me,
Fellow wanderer,
By the sea-way,
Fellow wanderer.
Ho ro la-il o

Son of Mary,
Fellow wanderer,
Warm thine eye,
Fellow wanderer.
Ho ro la-il o.

LOVE SONGS

EYE OF SPRINGTIDE

Eye of Springtide ! My own Allan !
Sound of running waters near us,
Eye of Springtide, my own Allan !

Green yon hollow 'neath branching hazel,
Drift o' bens low moving o'er us,
Eye of Springtide, my own Allan !

Far away the stag in lowing,
Drift o' bens still moving o'er us,
Eye of Springtide ! My own Allan !

Ne'er white candles we'll be smooring,
Till the sod shall smoor thine eyes, love,
Eye of Springtide ! My own Allan !
Sound of running waters near us,
Eye of Springtide ! My own Allan !

THE BENS OF JURA

Like water-cress gathered fresh from cool
streams,
Thy kiss dear love, by the Bens of Jura,
Cold, cold the Bens, cold thy love as they.
Like water-cress, gathered fresh from cool
streams.

Gold the morn at dawn upwingeth,
Dreams the night deep-drowned in dew-mist,
And my heart, reft of its own sun,
Deep lies sunk in death-torpor, cold and grey.

Like water-cress gathered fresh from cool
streams,
Thy kiss, dear love, by the Bens of Jura,
Cold, cold the Bens, cold the mist and grey.

THE ISLAND HERDMAID

Grows the yarrow in yonder grove,
Bides the yarrow when waters rove,
Dew o' the dawn and dew o' gloamin'
Keep thee fair, till wakens love.

Herds a maiden in yonder grove,
Laughter of streams in her eyes of love,
Sweet her call when flocks do wander :
Calls my heart : sweet herdmaiden she.

Hide her beauty, nor tell her name,
Two red cheeks like the rasps in flame,
Guileless she as Mary Mother :
Calls my heart ; sweet herd-maiden she.

Grows the yarrow in yonder grove,
Bides the yarrow when waters rove,
Dew o' the dawn and dew o' gloamin'
Keep thee fair, till wakens love.

AILEIN DUINN

If by some happy chance this book should find its way to certain remote corners of the earth, both east and west, there are men there who will smile (but with a gulp in the throat) when their eyes light on the sad old drowning-song, '*Ailein Duinn ò hì shiubhlainn leat.*' The picture of a little village in the isles will start up before them: at one end the ruins of a castle: on the shore below it an old boat turned upside down: a white-haired fisher man leaning against it, with a band of boys at his feet. The sea, the village, the castle, and possibly the boat, are still there, but it is years now since old Angus, the man from Barra, dreamed away, at the parting of night and day, to *Tìr-nan-òg*. Perhaps some of the boys are sitting at his feet there too, drinking in, as of yore, the talk to which the old song was always the preface :—

Oh! yes, a beautiful song that, but sore to sing and seven times sorer to feel. I once knew a woman who both sang it and felt it—long, long ago. The sea, the sea, boys, she puts many a woman into the tears and the song, but for all that she is aye the mistress for old Angus. When I was a baby, it was the crōnan of the waves that put me to sleep, and almost before I could walk I began to paddle about in the wee lochans on the sand. And when I grew up to be a big strong stump of a lad, I was never happy

till my father (rest to his soul!) took me as a hand on his own smack. Maybe you will be thinking there was no fun in that at all, but eh! boys, I can tell you it needed navigation to be a hand on my father's smack. There was Ardnamurchan Point, and whiles there was Corrievreckan, and there was the wicked swell off Eigg, and there was the wide sea between Skye and Uist, and there were reefs and rocks forbye, reefs and rocks on which name had never been put, and reefs and rocks which never came up except when our smack was at sea. But did you say fear, boys? Fear on old Angus, or young Angus, as he was then? Never the fear, boys: my father believed there was One above who was Ruler of the waves, and my mother was aye praying to that One, and myself, though no very serious-minded, took off my bonnet every time I passed the chapel or saw others on their knees. Och! och! those were the happy days. Whiles we went to Tobermory for goods, and whiles we even went to Oban for dainties—and eh! boys, those towns were big then, bigger than Glasgow is now, and the shops were finer, and the lights were brighter. I would go ashore with a few bawbees in my pocket, as proud as a king, and come aboard again with white carvy and wee bits of ribbon for my mother, and trumps for the bairns, and goodies for the lassies on the Lord-day. Oh! yes, I liked fine to be civil to the lassies, and walk to the chapel with them, and maybe give them

texts that were no' in the Book at all. And then there was the run home, boys, through old *Caol Muile*, past Ardtōrnish and Duart and Fiunary and Drimnin—eh ! boys, is there no' the taste of honey on each name of them ! Ardtōrnish and Duart and Fiunary and Drimnin ! And it was there the fun would be, and more than fun, racing the Tyree smacks through the Kyles : and I am telling you, boys, they were the heroines at the sailing, those same Tyree smacks. And there was one among them, but she was a wee devil from Colonsay, and sure she must have had the *siubhal-sìthe*, the fairy speed, whatever. Her steersman would ask you in the passing—when did you scrape her keel ?—and before an impudent answer could leap from your heart to your mouth, my hero could not hear one word you said—no, never a word, though you should have a thunder on the tip of your tongue. Och ! och ! but yon wee devil from Colonsay ! And at twilight maybe, or soon after, we would be at anchor in Canna Isle, and if there we were, sure enough it was the ceilidh for us that night whatever. And that was the ceilidh you might call a ceilidh ! There would be a crew from Eigg and a crew from Uist, and whiles a crew from Sōay, all kindly folk of our own isles : and after we had told them the news of the world, how the war was going on, and the price of lobsters in Oban, and when the salt-boat was expected in Tobermory, then the songs and the tales would begin, and it would be song for the

song and tale for the tale till midnight, or maybe later if there was oil enough in the crusie. But am not I the forgetful one! Midnight, did I say? I am telling you, boys, that if the tale-man from Eigg or the wee shaggy fiddler from Sōay was there, and it was there they loved to be, it wasn't midnight then nor cock-crow nor the going out of the crusie that would see us away, but the end of a tale that had no end or the snapping of fiddle-strings without others to replace them. Eh! boys, the ceilidh, the ceilidh, and the crusie, and the bonnie fire of peats, and the tales of Eigg, and the croons of Uist, and the music of Sōay, and the soft singing Gaelic of Canna Isle—eh! boys, the ceilidh, the ceilidh, the old beautiful ceilidh of the young days that were! And next day, if we didn't leave Canna early, and it was never early we left, we would see, sometime before midnight maybe, the white swell on Barra shore, and for certain a light in one little cottage: and my father would be thinking too he could see my mother (though, of course, he couldn't) standing in the door and waving her best apron at us. And when we got home we would find supper put down for us in the ben-room (but we knew fine we were no' to be expecting the same next morning): and we would find too that the bairns had fallen asleep with their wee handies lying wide open on the bedcover, ready at any moment to grip the goodies and the trumps—and eh! boys, they did look bonnie, bonnie in their sleep.

And just as I would be nid-nodding into the same sleep myself, I would be hearing my father and my mother crooning side by side the old Night Blessing of the Isles ;

A Dhe nan Dùl rinn iùl duinn thar a' chuan,
Thoir duinn a nis sèamh-shuain fo sgéith do ghràidh.

King of the Elements, our guide across the sea,
Grant us now soft sleep beneath thy wing of love.

Eh ! boys, it was fine, fine while it lasted. But one night a woman in Barra sat at a cold fireside, though it was no' for want of peats, and wept the widow's tears, and sang *Ailein Duinn ò hì shiubhlainn leat.* Oh ! yes, a beautiful song, but sore to sing, and seven times sorer to feel.

AILEAN DONN

Ailean duinn, thy winding sheet
Of sea-white foam is loosely woven.
O hi shiubhlainn leat.

Pillowed is thy head on sand,
Thy bed the golden seaweed tangle,
O hi shiubhlainn leat.

God bedew thy soul with what
I got from thee of sweet caresses ;
O hi shiubhlainn leat.

Fishes are thy candles white,
And seals the watchers by thy bed.
O hi shiubhlainn leat.

Thronèd King, may my grave be
By Allan, in the purple sea !
O hi shiubhlainn leat.

Hi ri ri, ri ubhi,
Hi o ho, ho rionn o ho,
Ailean duinn
O hi shiubhlainn leat !

THE WITCHERY

THE WITCHERY

Such as wish to understand the Scottish Gael, what he is and what he is not, should study our witches as well as our saints. The responsible witches of Gaeldom were not of the weaklings who are merely bad-hearted, or are tricksters in self-defence. They were rather highly-gifted women who loved being alive, and who won their place by force of character, and by right of service. That supernatural powers were attributed to them by the people, makes one envy them ; if they really possessed those powers, one envies them still more. The only vice in them which would, perhaps, have shocked the saints was their keen sense of humour.

As the recognised guardians of the home-parish, the witches had a solemn sense of responsibility. Each would fight the other, and sometimes all the others, in defence of parochial rights and privileges. Each, too, made full use of all the arts, whether conventional or unconventional, to bring the luck of milk to her own sheilings, or the luck of fish to her own shores. And if the old tales can be trusted, the cows did give milk in the sheilings, and the herring did come to the shores, sooner or later.

But the witches were racial as well as parochial patriots. If the kiltless armies sometimes wondered why the mist was so thick and the rock so unexpected in Gaelic territory, there was a woman in the place called Moy who knew. And as likely as not, she was at that very moment handing round silver goblets, with something in them, to the six guests who jested and laughed around the fire, serious business being over. Many a time, too, did those same seven big ones, standing on the headland of Knoydart, hurl winds and waves against such sloops of war as carried intentions that might not be good for Gaeldom. 'It would not irk my great ship,' said a foreign princess, 'to carry the little Isle of Barra on her bow.' But Barra was somewhat bigger than she knew, and behind Barra and the rest of Gaeldom stood Gormshuil of Moy, and Doideag of Mull, and Laorag of Tiree, and Maol-odhar of Kintyre, and Luideag of the Bens and Corrag, Daughter of Iain the Fair, and Cas a'Mhogain Riabhaich from Glencoe. The very name strikes terror into one, even though the tub is not there.

The witches were, however, more companionable than their names. An evening with them in a certain ale-house on the Morar side of Loch Nevis would have been a lesson in the joy of living to such as could forget to be genteel. One would cross many a ferry to see the seven old crones, dancing hand-in-hand their circular dance, to the rhythm of a maddening tune.

Only, one could not merely look on ; it is in the circle one would be, between Gormshuil and Doideag. Greatly to be envied was the keeper of that ale-house. And there is at least one Gael who thinks hungrily of these witchery graces :

> Put I clearness in their head,
> Honey softness in their speech.

THE WITCHERY FATE SONG

See yonder the hawk and her back to the ground
And Corrac from No-way and Gormhool from Moy-way
To-morrow must leave the play of the waves.
Ah me, it is sore on the old still young.
A ree, a ree !
Down comes the hawk and she flies no more.

Down comes the hawk and she flies no more,
And Corrac from No-way and Gormhool from Moy-way
Will leave evermore the lea and the shore,
The glens and the hills where they loved to rove.
If days could return I'd heap laugh on the laugh,
Nor seek e'er to know what black fate might hide.
A ree ! A ree !
Down comes the hawk and she flies no more.

WITCHERY GRACES

THE WITCH, TO ORPHAN CHILDREN

Put I clearness in their head,
Honey softness in their speech,
Spell o' walkin' on the weak,
Spell o' deftness on the blind.
Ho na hook, Hóreen yo-ho !

THE LOVE LILT OF DOIDEAG, THE WITCH

One day, long ago, a withered old woman sat down in a nook near Tobermory Bay to think out certain ploys she had a mind for. A wind from the shore carried to her ear daft words of youth and love spoken by a boy to a girl. The withered crone chuckled : ' May the Good Being save myself from taking that same plague.' And thereupon Doideag, the great Witch of Mull, made her first and only song.

Ho he ho, the wound of love !
If I but may, I'll shun yon plague.

He's a shade upon the sea,
Ever changing with each wave ;
Try to seize him in his play—
In ice-cold waters thou shalt lave.

Sweet the tongue that's in his mouth,
Eyes in laughter—till they rue!
In his fingers fairy tunes,
A joy—but, och! a liar too.

Grip on stag by hindmost leg,
Grip on eel in dusk of eve,
Grip on salmon by the tail:
Thy grip on love that's out to thieve.

Ho he ho, the wound of love!
If I but may, I'll shun yon plague.

WHICH MAKES A HARPER

WHICH MAKES A HARPER

In one of the Isles there is a cave which is known to the lobster-fishers, and to the otters. In front of it there is a wrecked smack, partly covered with sea-pinks. From its mouth one can see the Coolin hills.

One day, long ago, three galleys, each from a different isle, put into the creek near by ; and the three crews, with their harpers, met in the cave, at the greying of night. Shortly before dawn the harping ceased, and the listening ones asked, softly but eagerly, whence the itch for music. Said a harper, ' She was a knee-woman who spent her days among the hills, looking for the plants of healing. Now and again, because of her gift, a call would come to her from the glen below, where the children were born and the people died. Her boy got the knowing from her, and the wonder of not knowing.' Said the second harper, ' I was herding a widow's one cow in a deserted sheiling. I saw a gnarled oak-tree standing alone, and a bird's nest in one of its branches. I climbed up to give a few worms to the little ones. The nest was empty. A thought and a sorrow came to me.' Said the third harper, ' It was a boat that came to our creek. There was a

woman in her. And she sang a strange tune, something from another shore. My fingers will always be feeling now for the other shore.' 'Which makes you a harper,' said the listening ones. 'Which makes me a little child,' said the harper.

AT THE WAVE MOUTH

And who may the strange one be
Who croons beside the wave mouth ?
Like sea-wrack brown and beauteous—
Who may yon strange one be ?

Nor merle she nor mavis she,
St Bride's bird she nor sea-mew,
Nor seal from far-away linns,
Nor Kyle sea-maiden she.

And who may the strange one be
Who croons beside the wave mouth ?
Like sea-wrack brown and beauteous—
Who may yon strange one be ?

RUNE OF THE MOON

Hail to thee, thou new-lit moon,
I bend the knee, thou queen so fair ;
Through the dark clouds thine the way be,
Thine who leadest all the stars ;
Though thy light e'en find me joy-filled
Put thou flow-tide on the flood,
Send thou flow-tide on the flood.

RUNE TO THE SEA-GOD, LEAR

In their idle moments the boys of the Isles are sent by their fathers down to the fishing-rock to crush the whelks and limpets which are cast into the sea to lure the fish shoreward. The boys, being of the knowing sea-breed, do the crushing in what seems to be a natural cup in the rock, but is really the work of ancient human hands, and is still known to all good Islesfolk as *The Mermaid's Quaich.* Now and again, too, a boy of great faith will pour three palmfuls of salt water into the rock-cup and cry out loudly : ' May the fish of the sea follow the water of the sea to the rock of the shore.' Into that same rock-cup the boy's far-off ancestors poured, at the greying of night, a libation unto Lear, the Sea-God.

There was once a woman of the Isles who, in the greying of evening, stole down to the

fishing-rock and, singing her Rune, prayed that the King of the Seven Elements should smile upon herself and all waiting ones, children of the sea-doom. And, wonder of me! what dropped she into the rock-cup as an offering to Lear, the Sea-God, but her best and last treasure: a ringlet of yellow hair.

Grey of twilight in mine eye,
Hō lava hē hō;
Though sea-doomed, this grace be mine:
Smile of earth and sea and sky.
Ho lava he ho.

THE CELTIC GLOOM

The Celt is a creature of extremes ; his sadness is despair, his joy is rapture ; ' The sigh goes further than the shout,' as the Gaelic proverb puts it ; a whole day's rapture is soon forgotten, but a sigh in the night lingers long in the ear and heart. Some years ago two Gaels sat in the chapel-house of Eriskay and for hours recited to each other humorous Gaelic songs and stories, the one those of South Uist, the other those of Eigg and Skye. The audience, though small, was appreciative and laughed as heartily as the soft light of a peat fire in twilight would allow ; then, all of a sudden, the humour and the laughter ceased. The Western Sea was breaking on the shores of Uist. Later on the two men, still full of the Celtic Gloom, strolled through the mystic treeless island, and in the faint moonlight everything they saw and heard became steeped in sadness. And though boisterous reels were being danced in one cottage, and light airy iorrams, boat-songs, were being sung in another, yet the very joy-sounds seemed to die away in a yearning and a sigh. So meet the two extremes in the Celtic character.

The Western Sea, as every Islesman knows, can, even on a quiet evening, laugh like a youth whose love-tale is running smoothly, and moan like an aged man bewailing the sins of the past.

THE SILENT CRANE

Where blood-red tangle is heaving,
Where the silent crane on sea-rock
Watches Fate and Fate weaving
Love full strong as sea-rock.
Sore and sad my parting from thee
Run-mo-chridh' by sea-rock,
Sore and sweet my waiting for thee,
Run-mo-chridh' by sea-rock.

THE WHITE BIRD

The tale has it that there was once a bird, in the long ago, who had the tenderness of the swan and the kingliness of the eagle, and that when he returns, if return he should, Beltane and Savin (Samhainn) will be treading on each other's heels, so short and so glad will be the year.

There was once a widow in the Isles so poor that her neighbours gave her for name the Woman of Distress. In the springtide she got her living out of the shore, and in the neap-tide she would make for the hills to search for such roots as could be eaten. 'But praise to the Good Being,' said she, 'if to-day and to-morrow I do not get the fill of my mouth, I shall at any rate in hill or on shore, get the fill of my eye and of my ear, and that without stint.'

On a day of days she also got, on the shore, the fill of her heart.

She was gathering whelks in a creek, and what heard she, on the edge of the waves, but the plaint of a seal-pup and thereafter a laugh like the laugh of a little child? She leaped down towards the laugh. 'Are we not the well-met ones,' cried she, 'the widow and the orphan!' She carried the child home with her, and that part of him which grew not on the

dulse and on the watercress, grew exceeding well on the lilt and the heroic tale. And in his seventh year he saw, in a blood-red creek, the White Bird.

It may not be told, save in a whisper, but when the waxing would be on the moon and the flowing on the tide, the White Bird would become like unto one of the Seed of Adam, but of keener eye. And that same night the losing side would see a man on a white horse putting the strong to rout ; and the wounded would see by their bedside a woman clad in white with healing in her touch.

THE WAND'RING SHADE

Ho ró, ho ró, ho reé,
Hee ree, hee ree, ho ro,
A lone, lone shade.

I said to him I was only a simple lone maid,
Nor father, nor mother, nor sister, nor brother,
A wand'ring shade.

Ho ro, ho ro, hee ree,
Hee ree, hee ree, ho ro,
A lone, lone shade.

I said to him I was only a wandering shade,
My ancestors waiting, unborn, by the waves
In the land beyond.

THE PASSING OF BINNEVALE

Binnevale, Mouth of Music, had been for long on strangerhood in the Land of Barley, and on a day of days she said it was now meet for her to return homeward to her own sceptre-land, where the sun never sets, nor the wind rises, nor the music ends. In the greying of night she entered the Barge that needed sail nor rudder, but only the wish of her own heart, to make it go, and like a swan she glided out of sight. But on the gentle breeze of the autumn-tide she left behind her many a farewell, many a benediction :

Fare ye well, O folk of my love ;
There is guiding light on skerry that is known
to me ;
West of it lies my home.
Fare ye well, O folk of my love ;
In the ebb, in the flow ;
And whoso would follow me,
Let him take to the ferry of those same waves ;
And fare ye well, O folk of my love.

BINNEVALE—MOUTH OF MUSIC

Floating far through the sky, her singing
Made music's laughter o'er far blue sea-deeps,
Where men fish on their ancient sea-banks
And where night falls on the sheen white eel-strand.

O hà-ro-vee-eē-o,
Floated her song to far blue sea-deeps.
O hà-ro-vee-eē-o.

By grim skerries, A Righ! her singing
Awoke the seal by the haunts of sea-birds,
Where men fish by their ancient sea-banks
And where night falls on the sheen white eel-strand.

O hà-ro-vee-eē-o,
Floated her song to far blue sea-deeps.
O hà-ro-vee.

TIR-NAN-OG

The Celtic Heaven, Tir-nan-og, the Land-of-the-ever-young, lies somewhere to the west of the Hebrides, where the sun sets. And the Celtic soul ever waits on the shore of the great sea for the coming of the White Barge which, year in year out, ferries the elect across the waves to the Isle where they would be. And that same Barge needs wind nor sail nor rudder to make her speed like a bird over the sea ; the wish of the Fate that guides her is her all and her in all.

Death nor sorrow can live in thy beauteous land,
In the grave are deceit and guile ;
The brave are drinking of thy generous love,
Gladness floats in the clouds ;
Softly stars by day and by night
Shine softly through a mist ;
Mellowest harps grow up in thy woods,
O Land of Youth.

The roll of the waves, wistful is their sound,
As they chant thy praise in mine ear ;
The music of bens, of fountain and stream,
Flow seawards with thy song ;
By day thou art bewitching me
And wounding me with longing,
By night thou art my dreaming,
O Land of Youth.

Behind the waves, the ship of my dreaming
Goes wind-warding as of yore ;
The will of Fate is speeding her way
Silent and swift as a bird ;
White Barge, O leave me not in distress
By the shore of the mighty seas ;
Depths of pain and of love song-draw me,
O Tir-nan-Og.

JOY INVOCATION

Cantil o, Cantil ee !
Joy to all the gone before
Whose longer stay had pleased us.
Cantil o, Cantil ee !

Joy to all the left behind
Whose leaving would have grieved us.
Cantil o, Cantil ee !

Joy to all the still to come
Whose song may lift the weary.
Cantil o, Cantil ee !

THE PEAT-FIRE FLAME

(A TRAMPING SONG)

Far away and o'er the moor,
Morar waits for a boat that saileth;
Far away, down Lowland way,
I dream the dream I learned, lad,
By the light of the peat-fire flame,
Light for love, for lilt o' grail-deeds,
By the light o' the peat-fire flame—
The light the hill-folk yearn for.

Far away, down Lowland way,
Grim's the toil without tune or dream, lad;
All you need's a creel and love,
For the dream the heart can weave, lad,
By the light of the peat-fire flame,
Light for love, for lilt, for laughter,
By the light o' the peat-fire flame—
The light the hill-folk yearn for.

Far away the tramp and tread,
Tune and laughter of all the heroes,
Pulls one onward o'er the trail
Of the dream my heart may weave, lad,
By the light of the peat-fire flame,
Light for love, for lilt, for laughter,
By the light o' the peat-fire flame—
The light the hill-folk yearn for.

THE ROAD TO THE ISLES

(Written for the lads in France during the Great War)

It's a far croonin' that is pullin' me away,
As take I wi' my cromak to the road,
It's the far Coolins that are puttin' love on me,
As step I wi' the sunlight for my load.

Sure, by Tummel an' Loch Rannoch an' Lochaber I will go,
By heather tracks wi' heaven in their wiles,
If you're thinkin' in your inner heart braggart's in my step,
You've never smelt the tangle o' the Isles.
It's the far Coolins that are puttin' love on me,
As step I wi' my cromak to the Isles.

It's by Sheil Water that the track is to the West,
By Aillort and by Morar to the sea,
It's the cool cresses I am thinkin' o' for spunk,
An' bracken for a wink on Mother knee.

Sure, by Tummel, etc.

It's the blue Islands that are pullin' me away,
Their laughter puts the leap upon the lame,
It's the blue Islands from the Skerries to the Lews
Wi' heather honey taste upon each name.

Sure, by Tummel, etc.

NOTES

These are to make quite clear which poems are wholly or partly old ; the other poems are the author's own work.

Nearly all the Gaelic choruses given in the book are meaningless, like the English Tra la la, and are, therefore, not referred to in the Notes.

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23. An ancient Blessing found in North Uist.
24. This Rune has been pieced together from various fragments.
25. Two short fragments have been brought together here.
27. Old verses slightly altered to fit a tune.
30. Though the words are original, the repetitions are in the traditional mouth-music style.
35. All the quotations in 'The Celt and the Sea' are traditional.
36. *Caol Muile* (Cu*r*l Moola), the Sound of Mull.
Eilean Uaine (ayleen ooana), Green Isle.
Kyle, Moyle, a strait.
37. The teal-duck is a bird of good omen.
39. The Sea of Skee is the Minch between Skye and Uist.
47. Rōdel, in the Island of Harris, was in olden times the Iona of the Clan Macleod ; there, in the old church dedicated to St Clement, the patron-saint of the clan, their dead were buried and the living paid their vows.
49. *A-run* (ah-roon), 'O love.'
Sodor, earlier Sudreys, 'The Southern Isles,' the Scandinavian name for the Hebrides, to distinguish them from Nordreys, 'The Northern Isles,' applied to Orkney and Shetland. The name Sodor still survives in the Anglican bishopric of Sodor and Man.
54. *Iorram* (yiram), a rowing-song.
56. The words of *Sea Sounds* are a translation of an old Gaelic song.
Muran, sea-bent.

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56. *Sea-Longing* is founded on an old Gaelic Ballad.
57. *Death to webs* (cobwebs), *i.e.* stagnation.
58. *The Sea-Reivers' Song* is a translation of an old Gaelic song. One or two missing lines have been supplied.
Davach (Gaelic *Dabhach*), a large grain-vat, meaning here as much land as that amount of grain would sow.
Kiel (Gaelic *Cill*), a churchyard.
Cala, a harbour.
59. *Song of Sea-Widowhood* is a translation of old Gaelic words.
Sea-Sorrow is an old Gaelic Song.
63. *Tālla* (Gaelic *Taladh*), a lullaby.
65. The *Sea-Tangle* words, with the exception of a few lines, are old.
80. *Ceilidh* (Kaylee), social gathering.
A tacksman was a gentleman farmer.
85. *I mo chridh thu* (ee-mo-chree-oo), literally 'Iona of my heart thou.'
86. *Mo chridhe* (mo-chree), 'of my heart.'
88. *Tir-nan-og* (cheer-nun-awk), 'Land of the Ever-Young,' the Heaven of the Gael.
Beallach (b-yallach), a pass.
89. *O Bhrighde* (O Vreedja), O Bride or Bridget (the famous woman-saint of the Celtic Church).
90. *Colum-cille*, St Columba of Iona.
92. Words mainly old, as explained in the introduction.
93. Words old.
Birlinn, barge.
98. The verses are taken from a book of Gaelic Hymns compiled by the late Father Allan Macdonald, the king-priest of Eriskay.
105. *Skīr* (Gaelic *Sgir*), a parish.
113. Old words.
115. *Rōdel Fishing Rune*. Words old. *Colum* is St Columba, and *Clement* the patron-saint of the Clan Macleod.
118. Words old. *Linn* is a waterfall, and *quern* a hand-mill.
119. *Sil, a bho, sil am bainne*, 'Pour, O cow, pour forth the milk.'

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119. *Heartling of my Heart.* Words old.

120. *The Rough Bounds,* a certain area in the Clanranald country.

121. Words old.

123. Words partly old.

132. Various fragments are pieced together here.

143. *Iomair o, 'illean-mhara,* Row ye, lads of the sea.

145. *A-roon-ghil,* 'Thou white love.'
Ah-chree, 'Thou heart.'

150. *Deirdre's Farewell.* First verse traditional; second and third verses from the Glenmasan MS. of the thirteenth century.

151. *Cuchullan and his Son.* Words old.

153. *Daughter of Maeve.* Words old.

155. *Fionn's* (Fewns) *Keening.* Words old.

156. *Thrawn-day,* Day of Judgment. Words old.

157. *Chailin og, a stiuir thu mi?* 'Young maiden, wilt thou steer me?'

158. An old heroic tale, as preserved in the Island of Eigg.

164. One of the old Eigg stories. The *Feinne* (Fayn) was a body of Gaelic heroes corresponding to the Knights of the Round Table.

178. The *Cradle Spell* is old.

179. The pieces 'after Mary Macleod' are partly old and partly new.

182. *Ruari of Dunvegan.* Partly old and partly new. The 'snood' was the sign of maidenhood, the 'coif' of wifehood.
'*Cradle Lord of the Isles.*' Selected from old words.

185. Words selected from old verses.
Reilig of Oran, the burial-ground of the Kings in Iona.

189. *Criosd is Ailean is Tearlach Og,* Christ and Allan and the Young Prince Charlie.
The Love Song is a paraphrase of some old verses attributed to Flora Macdonald.

191. The words are old.
Kisting, laying into the *kist* or coffin.

THE ROAD TO THE ISLES

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196. The verses are partly old and partly new. *Graidhean donn* (Grah-yan down), 'My brown love.'

200. *Troutling of the Sacred Well.* The verses are an old legend arranged to fit a tune.

207. *Fairy Plaint.* An old Hebridean song.

211. The words are partly old and partly new.

212. Founded on an old fragment.

214. *Ailein Duinn ò hì shiubhlainn leat.* 'Fair Allan, ō-hee, I would wander with thee.'

219. An old Hebridean song.

225. *The Witchery Fate Song* is a mere fragment eked out.

226. *The Witchery Graces,* an old fragment.
Love Lilt of Doideag. Partly old and partly new.

232. A fragment completed.

233. *Rune of the Moon.* A fragment eked out.

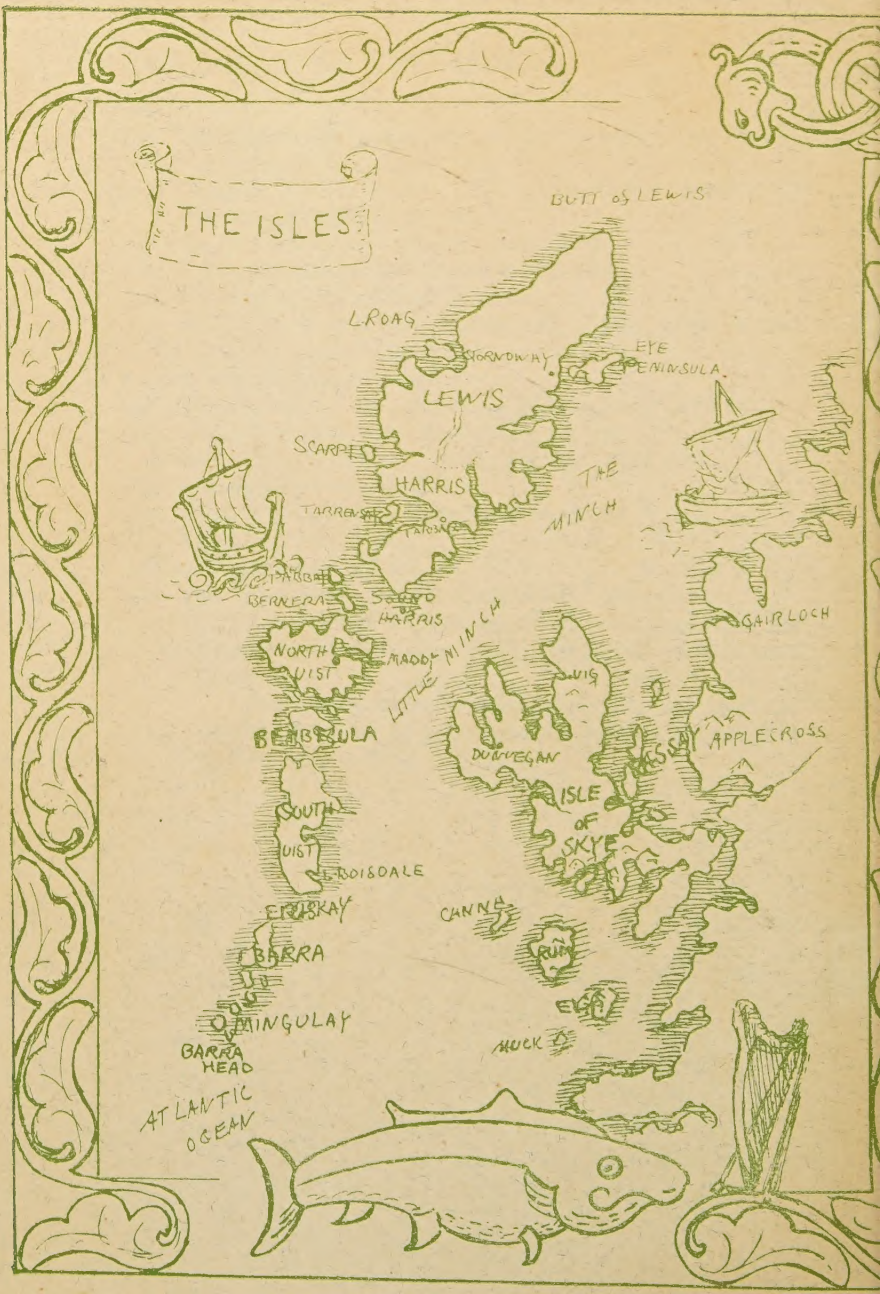
237. *Savin,* All Souls' Day.

238. A fragment completed.

239. This is tradition given in the writer's own words.

244. The track referred to here led in the old days from the Northern Isles to the Cattle Trysts of Falkirk and Carlisle.

Traditionally water-cress is regarded as both food and drink; it is said to have been the food of the pilgrims on their way to Iona.


THE ISLES
BUTT of LEWIS
LEROAG
STORNOWAY
EYE PENINSULA
LEWIS
SCARP
HARRIS
THE MINCH
TARBERT
TARBERT
BERNERA
SOUND of HARRIS
GAIRLOCH
NORTH UIST
LITTLE MINCH
BENBECULA
DUNVEGAN
APPLECROSS
ISLE OF SKYE
SOUTH UIST
BOISDALE
ERISKAY
CANNA
RUM
BARRA
EIGG
MINGULAY
MUCK
BARRA HEAD
ATLANTIC OCEAN

CANNA
RUM
EIGG
MORAR
MUCK
MOIDART
FT WILLIAM
ARDNAMURCHAN
COLL
TIREE
MORVEN
APPIN
STAFFA
MULL
OBAN
ATLANTIC OCEAN
IONA
LORNE
LOCH AWE
ISLES OF THE SEA
LOCH FINE
OLONSAY
ORONSAY
JURA
ISLAY
BUTE
SKIGHAY
ARRAN
CAMPBELTOWN
FIRTH OF CLYDE
P.K.F.H.